Micah

VOLUME 24I

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John J. Collins
General Editor

THE ANCHOR YALE BIBLE

Micah

A New Translation with
Introduction and Commentary

BOB BECKING

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Preface

Among the Minor Prophets, the book of Micah is of great importance. I encountered Micah for the first time when, in school days long gone, I had to memorize the names of the twelve minor prophets. Who was he? I had no idea. As I began to take a little more interest in the Bible, I discovered that Micah was a "progressive prophet." He turned out to be a pacifist with a keen eye for social injustice. This appealed to me as a growing youth. As a theology student, I read Micah in Hebrew—not an easy task. This stubborn prophet (and his followers) left a tricky text that does not reveal itself easily to the reader. But is the text his own? Adam van der Woude has argued that large parts of Micah were not written by the prophet himself. In chapters 2–5 of Micah, van der Woude reads a debate between two parties. On one side stands the prophet of doom, Micah, and on the other, prophets baking sweet breads—*Sijsjeslijmers,* they would say in Amsterdam, where, in the vernacular language, this word is used to indicate dawdlers trying to please those in power. This view was at first convincing and, for me, a real alternative to the idea that the prophecies of salvation were added to the book of Micah only in the postexilic era. After a while, I started to see fissures in van der Woude's view and embarked upon another route to solve the problems. The results of that adventurous quest may be found in this commentary.

It is an honor to be a participant in the Anchor Yale Bible series. I thank John Collins for his patience with this slow and dilatory Dutchman and Robert Allen for his advice on English.

All translations of ancient texts are mine unless otherwise indicated.

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Abbreviations

<. . .>	words between angle brackets are construed to be later additions
1.c.p.	first-person common plural (gender neutral)
1.c.s.	first-person common singular (gender neutral)
2.m.p.	second-person masculine plural
2.m.s.	second-person masculine singular
3.f.s.	third-person feminine singular
3.m.p.	third-person masculine plural
3.m.s.	third-person masculine singular
ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary.* Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABL	*Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collections of the British Museum.* Edited by Robert F. Harper. 14 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1892–1914
AfOB	Archiv für Orientforschung: Beiheft
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs
AO	Antiquités Orientales Museum number of Cuneiform tablets, Louvre Museum, Paris
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ARM	Archives Royales de Mari

ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
ASTI	Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge
BBS	*Babylonian Boundary Stones in the British Museum.* L. W. King. London: British Museum, 1912
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BEvT	Beihefte zu evangelische Theologie
BHK	*Biblia Hebraica.* Edited by R. Kittel. Liepzig: Hinrichs, 1905–1906
BHQ	*Biblia Hebraica Quinta.* Edited by A. Schenker et al. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004–
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.* Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983.
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
BIN	Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of James B. Nies
BiOr	Bibliotheca Orientalis
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BK	Biblische Kommentar
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BThSt	Biblisch-Theologische Studien
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.* Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2006
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CH	Codex Hammurabi
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East

ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
CoS	*The Context of Scripture.* Edited by W. W. Hallo. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2016
CTB	Calwer Taschenbibliothek
CTH	*Catalogue des textes hittites.* Edited by E. Laroche. 2nd ed. Paris: Klincksieck, 1971
D	Deuteronomistic source/redaction
DCH	*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew.* Edited by David J. A. Clines. 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2014
DDD	*Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible.* Edited by K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst. 2nd rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DUL3	*A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition.* G. del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín. 3rd rev ed. Translated and Edited by W. G. E. Watson. Leiden: Brill
EA	El-Amarna tablets. According to the edition of J. A. Knudtzon. *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln, mit Einleitung und Erläuterungen.* 2 vols. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908–1915
ERC	Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations
ESHM	European Seminar on Historical Methodology
ET	English translation
ETCSL	Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FB	Forschungen zur Bibel
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GAT	Grundrisse zum Alten Testament
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
Hi.	*hiphil*
Hitp.	*hithpael*
Hoph.	*hophal*
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs

ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JfS	*Journal for Semitics*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSSEA	*Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KAI	*Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften.* H. Donner and O. Röllig. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz: 1976
KAR	*Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts.* Edited by E. Ebeling. Leipzig: Hinrichs: 1919–1923
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KHC	Kurzer Hand Commentar
KJV	King James Version
KTU	*Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit.* Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013. 3rd enl. ed. of *KTU: The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras ibn Hani, and Other Places.* Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995
LÄ	*Lexikon der Ägyptologie*. Edited by W. Helck, E. Otto, and W. Westendorf. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LKA	*Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Assur.* E. Ebeling and F. Köcher. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1953
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
LSJ	Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, and H. S. Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon.* 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996
LXX	Septuagint

MT	Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible
Mur	Manuscripts from Wadi Murabba'at
NASB	New American Standard Bible
ND	Cuneiform Inscription excavated at Kalhu/Nimrud
Ni.	*niphal*
NIV	New International Version
OBO	*Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis*
OTL	Old Testament Literature
OTS	Old Testament Studies
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
Pi.	*piel*
PIA	Publications of the Institute of Archaeology
POS	Pretoria Oriental Studies
POT	De Prediking van het Oude Testament
Q	Manuscripts from Qumran according to the standard citation format
RA	*Revue d'Assyriologie*
RB	*Revue Biblique*
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
SWBA	Social World of Biblical Antiquity
TADEA	*Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt.* B. Porten and A. Yardeni. Newly Copied, Edited, and Translated into English. 4 vols. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986–1999
ThW	Theologische Wissenschaft
TNK	*Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985

TU	*Tablettes d'Uruk à l'usage des prêtres du Temple d'Anu au temps des Séleucides.* F. Thureau-Dangin. Paris: Heuthner, 1921
UET	Ur Excavations, Texts
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTE	Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WO	*Die Welt des Orients*
ZAH	*Zeitschrift für Althebräistik*
ZABR	*Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

INTRODUCTION

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I.

The Aim of This Commentary

The biblical book of Micah is generally known for two quotations and one vision. The following text is often connected with the birth of the Messiah: "And you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, least among the clans of Judah, from you one shall come forth to rule Israel for Me—One whose origin is from of old, from ancient times" (Mic 5:1, TNK). And these words are seen as the formulation of a basic moral standard: "He has told you, O man, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk modestly with your God" (Mic 6:8, TNK). The vision of forthcoming peace in Micah 4—especially the lines "and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" (Mic 4:3, TNK)—is embraced by all who long for a world without warfare. The book of Micah, however, contains more than only these lines. Reading the biblical book in its entirety puts these words into context and adds profundity to them.

The aim of this commentary is to read the text of Micah in its original historical and religious setting. This sentence needs some explanation. By "read," I mean to interpret, that is, to try to establish the meaning and message of the ancient text. This implies a grammatical analysis of the text as well as a semantic study of the words and phrases in the text. I therefore will perhaps annoy the reader with grammatical peculiarities and also comparisons with expressions found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, and in ancient Near Eastern texts, that I think will help in understanding the text. By "the text," I refer to the Hebrew text as it has been transmitted in the Codex Leningradensis. The question of whether and to what degree this medieval manuscript reflects the more original version is discussed below in Chapter II: "The Text of the Book of Micah." The phrase "its original historical and religious setting" opens a set of questions. When did Micah live? The title of the book mentions three kings of Judah—Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah—who reigned during the final decades of the eighth century BCE. Was the book written all at once, implying an eighth-century context, or is the present text the

result of a long and complex process of redaction, implying that the original core was reapplied to changing circumstances? The compositional and redaction-historical questions are dealt with in Chapter V, "The Genesis of Micah," and the context is described in Chapter VI, "Micah in History."

Before delving into the text of the book of Micah, I offer brief remarks of a more technical character. Much has been written about these seven chapters. On many topics a lengthy list of references could be given, but instead, I restrict myself to a maximum of five (given in parentheses) that indicate the most important publications on a given topic.

II.

The Text of the Book of Micah

The Hebrew text of the book of Micah has been transmitted in its Masoretic recension in the Codex Leningradensis. This codex forms the basis of all modern editions (*BHK, BHS, BHQ*). It should be noted that this codex dates from the early eleventh century CE, implying that there is a gap of about fifteen hundred years from the assumed period of Micah's activity to the codex. The findings of biblical manuscripts from Qumran, however, have made clear that the unvocalized text of the Hebrew Bible has been transmitted very carefully. Although minor mistakes may have occurred, it seems safe to take the Masoretic textual form as a starting point for this commentary.

Among the documents from Qumran are two interpretative texts on Micah (1Q14 = 1QpMic = DJD 1, 77–80; 4Q168 = 4QpMic; Sinclair 1983; Fuller 2020). These very fragmentary pesharim contain the Hebrew text of some passages mainly from Micah 1 and 6 with a commentary relating the texts to events from the second century BCE. The fragments of the Hebrew text of Micah concur with the Masoretic tradition. In the oldest Minor Prophets scroll (4QXII^{a} = 4Q76) the section on Micah is absent. The better-preserved Minor Prophets scroll (4QXII^{g} = 4Q82) contains sections of Micah 1–5 and 7. The Hebrew text does not differ very much from the Masoretic tradition. In the nearby Wadi Murabba'at, a scroll containing the Hebrew text of parts of Joel, Zechariah, and Micah was found (Mur XII = Mur 88; DJD 2, 181–205), the text of which is almost identical with that of the Codex Leningradensis (without the punctuation).

In the first part of the second century BCE, the Book of the Twelve prophets was translated into Greek by Jews living in Alexandria in Egypt (Dines 2004, 21–22; Glenny 2015, 1–16; Fuller 2020). This translation into competent Greek is known from Greek manuscripts from the third century CE on. The translation follows the Hebrew of Micah rather closely with some variants that should be classified as interpretative and hence not reflecting a different *Vorlage*. Variants are discussed below as appropriate.

The oldest Greek text of the Book of the Twelve comes from a cave at Naḥal Ḥever (8ḤevXIIGr; Barthélemy 1963, 170–78). This late-first-century BCE fragmentary scroll

presents a translation into Greek that can be construed as a recension of the LXX with the aim of adapting the text to the proto-Masoretic tradition (Barthélemy 1963). The text of 8ḤevXIIGr contains portions of Micah: 1:1–7, 4:3–5, 4:6–10, 5:1–4, and 5:4–6. Interestingly, the name of the God of Israel is written in paleo-Hebrew characters.

The translations into Latin—Vetus Latina and the Vulgate—and into Syriac are of no great text-critical value (see for details Sebök 1887, 46–54). The Aramaic Targum Jonathan of the book of Micah gives a translation of the Hebrew text with relatively few interpretative additions. An Arabic translation of Micah is found in two sixteenth-century CE polyglots (Ryssel 1885).

In general, the MT, without the vocalizations, requires no changes or emendations.

III.
Ancient Readers of Micah

The earliest interpretation of the book of Micah is to be found in two pesharim from Qumran (1Q14 = 1QpMic = DJD 1, 77–80; 4Q168 = 4QpMic; Sinclair 1983; Maier 1996a, 126–29). Both texts read the book against the background of the events of the second century BCE. The text of 1QpMic connects the reference to the "high places of Judah" (1:5) with a figure called *mṭyp hkzb,* "the spreader of lies." In the pesher, he stands in opposition to the well-known Qumranic figure of the "teacher of righteousness," who, by keeping the Torah, paved the way for the community. In other words, the community of Qumran read the book of Micah as approving of and supporting their religious worldview. The second pesher (4QpMic) contains the Hebrew text of Mic 4:9–12 but provides no interpretation.

The New Testament contains a few quotations of and allusions to the text of Micah, which are discussed below at the appropriate verses. The most famous is the reference to Mic 5:1–3 in the Gospel of Matthew. With the messianic interpretation of the announcement of a ruler and its application to the birth of Jesus, the Gospel offers another argument for its view that Christianity is the correct continuation of Judaism (Roukema 2019, 5–7). Matthew 10:34–36 // Luke 12:53 adapts the theme of the distortion of family relations when the author has Jesus say (without any reference to Micah): "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household." Here Jesus is presented as the one who will implement the announcement of Mic 7:5–6 (Roukema 2019, 7–8).

Early Jewish and Christian traditions identified Micah of Moreshet with his namesake Micaiah ben Imlah (1 Kgs 22). This identification can already be found in *Ascension of Isaiah* 2:12–15 and *Lives of the Prophets* 6:1 and has long been influential—up to the rise of modern scholarship (Roukema 2019, 40–41). In the Talmud, the prophet is

identified with the Micah mentioned in the book of Judges who hired a Levite to serve in his idolatrous cult (Judg 17–18; see b. Sanh. 103b and b. Pesah. 117a).

In texts from the Greek and Latin church fathers, there is a clear tendency to read the book of Micah from a messianic perspective (Hidal 1996; Roukema 2019, 37–230). Almost all fathers read the text on the future ruler from Bethlehem (Mic 5:1–3) as a prediction of the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. In his refutation of the ideas of the Greek philosopher Celsus, Origen stated:

> Now the Scripture speaks, respecting the place of the Savior's birth—that the Ruler was to come forth from Bethlehem—in the following manner: And you Bethlehem, house of Ephrata, are not the least among the thousands of Judah: for out of you shall He come forth unto Me who is to be Ruler in Israel; and His goings forth have been of old, from everlasting. Now this prophecy could not suit any one of those who, as Celsus' Jew says, were fanatics and mob-leaders, and who gave out that they had come from heaven, unless it were clearly shown that He had been born in Bethlehem, or, as another might say, had come forth from Bethlehem to be the leader of the people. With respect to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, if any one desires, after the prophecy of Micah and after the history recorded in the Gospels by the disciples of Jesus, to have additional evidence from other sources, let him know that, in conformity with the narrative in the Gospel regarding His birth, there is shown at Bethlehem the cave where He was born, and the manger in the cave where He was wrapped in swaddling-clothes. (*Contra Celsum* 1.51; see Roukema 2019, 131)

When discussing the book of Micah, Eusebius, first quoting Matthew 2, states:

> I have quoted these passages in full to show that what happened at Bethlehem at the Birth of our Savior furnishes adequate evidence that He was the Person meant by the prophecy. And to this day, the inhabitants of the place who have received the tradition from their fathers, confirm the truth of the story by showing to those who visit Bethlehem, because of its history, the cave in which the Virgin bore and laid her infant. (*Demonstratio evangelica* 7.2)

After this he continues with a supersessionist discourse arguing that at the time of the birth of Jesus Messiah, the Jewish people had lost their favored position with God. Many others expressed the same view as Origin and Eusebius (see Roukema 2019, 130–36).

An exception to this view is found with Theodoret, who argues that Mic 5:1–3 should be construed as a prophecy of Zerubbabel, who was of the lineage of David (*In Michaeam* 5.2; see Roukema 2019, 129–30).

A comparable pattern is visible in the interpretation by the church fathers of almost every line of Micah. The great majority of them read the book with a Christological gaze and an anti-Jewish bias. Justin Martyr, for instance, reads the panorama on peace in Micah 4 as a description of the time after the birth of Jesus Messiah (*Dialogus cum Tryphone* 109.1–110.1; see Roukema 2019, 104). Theodoret, again, is the exception, with his view that the passage refers to the peace after the return from the Babylonian exile (*In Michaeam* 4.1–3; see Roukema 2019, 102–3).

Only a few glimpses of the heterodox interpretation of Micah have remained (Roukema 2019, 22–36). The gnostic Julius Cassianus (late second century CE) is said to have read Mic 6:7—"Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my womb for my personal sin?"—as meaning that Christians should abstain from sex in order to avoid sin:

> But on the question whether everyone who turns from sin to faith turns from sinful habits to life as though born of a mother, I may call as witness one of the twelve prophets who said, "Am I to give my firstborn for my impiety, the fruit of my womb for the sin of my soul?" This is not an attack on him who said: "Increase and multiply." Rather he calls the first impulses resulting from birth, by which we do not know God, "impiety." If on this basis anyone maintains that birth is evil, let him also on the same ground hold that it is good, since in it we recognize the truth. "Be sober as is right, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God," that is, those who sin. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual powers." But "the rulers of darkness" have power to tempt us. (apud Clement, *Stromateis* 3.101.1)

Again, the text of Micah is used to defend a specific religious position.

In the Jewish tradition there are only occasional references to the book of Micah. They mainly concern the moral code. The messianic interpretation is implicitly anti-Christian. In a discussion on the necessity of adulterers to drink the "bitter water," Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai is quoted:

> "I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery; for they consort with lewd women" (Hosea 4:14), meaning that when the husbands are adulterers, the wives are not punished for their own adultery. From the time when Yosei ben Yo'ezer of Tzereida and Yosei ben Yehuda of Jerusalem died, the clusters ceased, i.e., they were the last of the clusters, as explained in the Gemara, as it is stated: "There is no cluster to eat; nor first-ripe fig that my soul desires." (Mic 7:1; m. Sotah 9)

Here, the book of Micah is applied to a matter completely different from the Christological interpretation that characterizes many Christian readings. The tendency in Jewish readings of Micah is to focus on halachic questions and on the ongoing oppression of the Jewish people.

In the Talmud, Micah is praised for summarizing all the commandments in three clauses: "Micah came and established the 613 mitzvot upon three, as it is written: 'It has been told to you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord does require of you; only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God'" (Mic 6:8; b. Mak. 24a; author's translation). The Talmud presents a messianic interpretation of Mic 5:1–3, but without any connection with Jesus:

> Rav says: The son of David will not come until the evil Roman kingdom will disperse throughout Eretz Yisrael for nine months, as it is stated: "Therefore will He give them up, until the time when she who is in labor has given birth;

> then the remnant of his brethren shall return with the children of Israel." (Mic 5:2)
>
> Once a period equivalent to a term of pregnancy passes, the redemption will come. (b. Sanh. 98b; author's translation)

The period of nine months for Roman rule is of course deduced from the clause "until the time when she who is in labor has given birth." The targum of Micah does not contain explicit exegetical additions.

The medieval rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (1089–1164) is well known as a forerunner of Spinoza's critical stand on the Mosaic authorship of the Torah. Taking an approach that searched for the literal meaning of the biblical text, Ibn Ezra tried to avoid allegorical and kabbalistic interpretations. This way of reading led him to carefully and prudently formulate doubts about the Mosaic origin of texts like Gen 12:6 and the final verses of Deuteronomy. He also wrote on mathematics and astronomy. As for the book of Micah, Ibn Ezra was the first reader to observe the discrepancies between prophecies of doom and prophecies of salvation. He allotted the second category to the prophetic opponents of Micah (see *Miqraot Gedolot;* and Berlin and Brettler 2004, 1209). This view has influenced the dialogue model of Adam van der Woude (1976; see below).

The Reformation gave rise to new views on the book of Micah. On the one hand, the Christological reading was continued; on the other, the Lutheran perspective of justification through faith was read in its text. In his comprehensive commentary on Micah, John Calvin (1847) makes a distinction between prophecies of doom and announcements of salvation. The first category is directed to stubborn sinners, while the second category addresses the faithful, who were a remnant among that people. Calvin's reading of Micah, with its restrained Christological interpretation, is very nuanced and detailed. He reads Micah 5 in two stages: first as a prophecy directed to Micah's contemporaries, and second as a prediction of the birth of Jesus Messiah. Contrary to the church fathers he does not interpret other features of Micah in a Christological way. He is aware of the distance in time between Micah and Jesus and at times stresses the differences between the eighth century BCE and the era of the Roman Empire.

Luther (1989, 133–34), too, offers a Christological interpretation when he stresses that Micah was the only prophet who names Bethlehem as the town where Christ would be born ("die Stadt Bethlehem so gewiβ deutet un nennet, da Christus geboren sollte werden").

Another approach can be found in a work by the otherwise not well-known Lutheran minister Anthonius Otho (ca. 1505–ca. 1588) published in 1544. In this work, which concentrates on Micah 7, Otho takes a pietistic approach. Identifying himself with the "I" character of the chapter, and using the words of the prophet, he recognizes his own sinful existence and praises God for his mercy as offered in the final lines of the chapter.

In early modern Catholic studies, the book of Micah is underrepresented—as is the case with the whole of the Old Testament. An interesting exception is the work of Gaspar de Grajal (1530–1575), who came from a family that had converted from Judaism. He embraced the opportunity to study at Louvain and Paris, where he was trained in more humanistic approaches to the Bible. Back home in Salamanca, he taught his

students to read the Hebrew Bible in a literal way and not (or not only) along allegorical lines. The fruit of this teaching can be found in his only published work, *In Michaeam prophetam commentaria* (Salamanca 1570). Being an accomplished Hebraist, he proposed interpretations based on the Jewish tradition. His commentary was listed in the Catholic Church's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum,* and worldwide, only a few copies of it have remained (Domínguez Reboiras 1998). He died in prison after being condemned by the Inquisition. In the work of Gaspar de Grajal, the influence of the humanistic approach to the text becomes visible: grammatical analysis prevails over a doctrinal approach, although the Bible is still seen as scripture, that is, the revealed word of God.

In the prelude to the more radical Enlightenment, Old Testament scholars, among whom were Campegius Vitringa and Johann David Michaelis, more and more applied grammatical and lexical models to their interpretation of biblical texts. In doing so they could avoid the upcoming discourse on sources and redactions.

In the first part of the nineteenth century, various scholars tried to combine the historical-linguistic approach with their personal faith in Jesus Messiah. When interpreting the book of Micah, they produced much insight into the text and the book's historical context, but they always ended on a pious note. Among them was Justi (1820), who wrote a carefully balanced commentary. Another example is the thorough commentary of Carl Paul Caspari (1851–1852), who in his voluminous work offers great insight as well as suggestions for the pulpit. In a similar vein, the Dutch theologian Wildeboer (1884) offered an intriguing publication in which he tried to reconcile the historical approach with the Christian belief that Micah announced the birth of Jesus Messiah. He proposes an exegesis in two stages: after reading Micah in his historical context, one can see a Christological interpretation as an appropriation of the early church. With these views, which probably were adopted in circles of church-abiding scholars all over Europe, the edge of modernity was reached.

IV.
Critical Scholarship on Micah

With the rise of critical scholarship in biblical studies in the second part of the nineteenth century, the approach to the book of Micah changed drastically. The historical-critical approach put two important questions to the text: (1) How did it function in its original historical context? and (2) which parts of it are original?

The work of Bernard Stade (1881, 1883, 1884) forms a definitive turning point. In a set of three articles in the newly established journal *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft,* he propagated the view that original material from the prophet Micah was to be found in only the first three chapters of the book. Everything else was the result of later additions. Decisive for Stade was the presence of prophecies of doom next to prophecies of salvation. In his view, only one of the two could be original. Since

Micah is remembered as a prophet of doom (Jer 26:8), all the sections that express hope and peace should be regarded as later additions from a period in which Micah's announcements of doom were realized in the Babylonian exile.

Stade's line of reasoning has been dominant in Micah research for more than a century, and his influence is present in a series of commentaries (e.g., Wellhausen 1963; Robinson and Horst 1964; Mays 1976; McKane 1998; Jeremias 2007), dissertations (e.g., Elhorst 1891), and studies (Willi-Plein 1971, 70–114; Renaud 1977; Weingart 2019). Problematic in this approach remains the one-dimensional concept of a prophet—either announcing doom or expecting salvation, never both—and a narrow reading of a remark in the book of Jeremiah. When the elders of Jerusalem quoted the prophet Micah in defense of the threatened Jeremiah, they gave a situational remark that Micah too had been prophesying oracles of doom. This contextually necessary quotation does not imply, however, that Micah was known only as a prophet of doom.

Stade's line of thought also influenced the more recent redaction-historical approach. It should be noted, however, that scholars working along these lines do not restrict the original words of Micah to the first three chapters of the biblical book: authentic sparkles are seen throughout the seven chapters, although there is hardly a consensus, as will be made clear below.

Concurrent with this exegetical tradition runs an albeit much smaller line of scholarly views that are hesitant to accept the division of Micah into an authentic core and inauthentic additions (see for instance Sellin 1922; Hammershaimb 1961; Hagstrom 1988). Rudolph (1975) sees only later additions in Mic 4:1–4, 5:6–8, and 7:18–20. In the twenty-first century some scholars even claim that the whole of Micah was written in the eighth century BCE (Jacobs 2001; Dempster 2017; Gignilliat 2019). Although these scholars offer interesting insights, they have no answers to questions such as why there are prophecies of doom as well as prophecies of salvation in the book.

In the early 1950s, excavations at Kalhu/Nimrud brought to light a collection of vassal treaties and loyalty oaths that indicate that the Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon had his many vassals pledge an oath of obedience to him and his successor, Ashurbanipal (Wiseman 1958 = SAA 2.6); at Tell Tayinat another version of this succession treaty was found (Lauinger 2012 = SAA 2.15). The vassal treaties, or better, loyalty oaths, of Esarhaddon stand in a long ancient Near Eastern textual tradition. Earlier, the kings Šamši-Adad and Aššur-nerari formulated agreements with their vassals (SAA 2.1, 2.2), suggesting that the concept was already known in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE. All these ancient Near Eastern texts contained an *adê* ("binding agreement") between the Assyrian king and his various vassals. Soon after their publication, a connection was made with the concept of *bᵉrît* in the Hebrew Bible, a word often understood as "covenant." In the vassal treaties, the partners are threatened with all sorts of curses in case of disobedience. In the Hebrew Bible this idea is remolded into the idea that God, as a heavenly sovereign power, will punish his people with comparable curses on breaking the *berît* relationship. Different from the *adê* arrangement, the God of Israel will bless his people for keeping the moral code (see Deut 28; with Steymans 1995).

The comparative material gave way to studies in which the presence of treaty language in the texts of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible was highlighted (Hillers 1964;

Cathcart 1973; Freire 2017). These observations together with the increased scholarly regard for the Neo-Assyrian prophetic texts paved the way for an approach in which Micah was read in the light of the ancient Near Eastern texts (see Hillers 1984; Becking 2013; De Moor 2020). As will be made clear in this commentary, the author(s) of the book of Micah used the language and the concepts of the Assyrians, sometimes to underscore his (their) views, but often to mock the enemy with its own imagery.

An interesting view has been developed by Adam van der Woude (1976, 19–22), who divides Micah into three parts. He construes Micah 1 as a geographically ordered prophecy of doom uttered at Lachish in the early days of Micah's prophetic career. In his opinion, Micah 2–5 contains the text of a dialogue between the pessimistic prophet and some optimistic pseudo-prophets. His view is attractive to some degree, especially since he is pointing to the possibility of a very early example of abusing scripture by quoting it verbatim (van der Woude 1973). In van der Woude's view, Micah's opponents would have placed scripture against scripture, Isaiah versus Micah. Their quotation of the text from Isaiah 2 was used to counter Micah's pessimistic words. In doing so, they abused scripture for their own ideology.

Van der Woude's proposal is attractive for its explanation of the "doom"/"salvation" dichotomy in Micah 2–5. Some (Boogaart 1981; Strydom 1988) have adopted his view, but the vast majority of scholars have challenged it. As for the rest of Micah, chapters 6–7 were written, in van der Woude's view, by Deutero-Micah, who prophesied in the Northern Kingdom about ten years before Micah of Moreshet-Gath (van der Woude 1971, adapting Burkitt 1926; adopted by Strydom 1988; Wagenaar 2001a, 49–54; Gruber 2007, 2–3).

A fresh approach has been undertaken by Johannes de Moor (2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2005, 2017, 2020). In his opinion, the first step in the exegetical process should be the demarcation of the units in the text. In the framework of the Pericope series, he collected data from ancient manuscripts (mainly Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, and Latin) on the delimitation of the book of Micah. In search of a firmer basis for the division into textual units, he reached a series of interesting results that are discussed and mainly adopted in this commentary.

Reader-oriented readings of Micah explicitly interpreting the texts from a specific view are found in the commentaries of O'Brien (2015: feminism), Smith-Christopher (2015: antiwar), and Dempster (2017: evangelical Christianity), as well as in an article by Mosala (1993: liberation theology). A poststructuralist approach is to be found in the work of Runions (2001), who argues for a nonreductionistic view in which differences in the text are brushed away. This work inspired me to rethink my own presuppositions as an open-minded scholar who is also a committed but liberal Lutheran. My approach is to be aware of all this and avoid a position in which Micah is a ventriloquist for my own ideas.

The book of Micah first lost its Jewish character when it was read through a Christological lens. The book lost its Christian predictive character when people started to read it according to the contours of its own time. It lost its integrity when critical scholars started to pose questions concerning sources, layers, and redaction (see Jeppesen 1979). Despite all of these different approaches, the text of Micah has never failed to make an impression upon its readers.

V.

The Genesis of Micah

"The question of the evolution of the Hebrew text of the Book of Micah is probably a mystery which will never be unraveled." This statement of Knud Jeppesen (1978, 14) still has its value despite all efforts to reach a consensus on the redactional growth of Micah in the more than forty years since the publication of his article. As already indicated, various proposals have been made as to the genesis of the present book of Micah. In my discussion, I make a distinction between scholars who do not take the whole of the twelve minor prophets into consideration and those who do.

Independent of the question about the role of Micah in the redactional history of the Book of the Twelve, scholars have proposed models for the redactional growth of the book (or parts of it; see for instance Willi-Plein 1971, 70–114; Renaud 1977; Jeremias 2007, 115–21; Schütte 2016, 84–113; Coomber 2021). These proposals sometimes overlap but often contradict each other. I present two examples to illustrate this.

1. In a well-argued, form-critical discourse, Wagenaar (2001a) proposes six redactional layers that were added to the original late preexilic core: Mic 2:1–3bα*, 4aα, bβ; 2:8*, 9–10; 3:1–2a, 3.5aα, 2b, 4*; 3:5aβ–7; 3:9–12 (in this editorial order). Additions were made in various periods: early exilic (circles around Jeremiah; especially the core of Micah 1), late exilic (school of Ezekiel; for instance, 4:6–7a), early postexilic (Isaianic circles; especially 4:1–5), and late postexilic (the heading and Micah 6–7). Micah 5:4–5b is allotted by Wagenaar to a not-dateable stratum, while he posits three glosses added to the text even later (see also the remarks by Smith-Christopher 2015, 37–39).
2. According to Corzillius (2016), the oldest core can be found in the words about the cities in the Shephelah (Mic 1:11–15*). These words may go back to the historical Micah of the eighth century BCE. They form the point of crystallization around which the other parts were added at the time of Jerusalem's demise and during the Persian period in order to update the text. The first addition is found in Micah 1 and aims to portray the judgment of God as directed against Samaria and Jerusalem for their religious failure. This editorial layer would be dated just before the downfall of Jerusalem. During the exile, in three steps, Micah 1–3 was formed (minus the prophecy of salvation in 2:12–13). In this layer Micah is represented as a critic of social relations in the tradition of Amos. After the exile, the salvation oracles from Micah 4–5 were added during a complex process. Now that the judgment had become a reality, there was room for hope and expectations for the future. The later addition, again in different phases, of Micah 6–7 was prompted by the fact that despite the return from Babylon, Israel was yet again mired in sin. In sum: Corzillius assumes fifteen layers in four centuries.

A cornerstone in the argument of these and other proposals is the quotation in Jer 26:18. A group of elders save the life of Jeremiah by referring to the prophet Micah,

who had delivered a comparable prophecy of doom during the reign of Hezekiah. It is uncertain whether these elders quoted from memory (De Moor 2020, 41) or had a written scroll at hand (van der Toorn 2007, 177). Generally, scholars argue on the basis of the verse that Micah was a prophet solely of doom. Hillers (1984, 9; see also Jenson 2008, 95) already warned of oversimplification. In my view, Jer 26:18 refers to only one aspect of the message of Micah that was appropriate in the given circumstances. The quotation as such is not enough evidence to classify Micah as a prophet of doom only.

Around 1990 the redaction-historical method was adopted by scholars working on the Book of the Twelve. The designation "the twelve prophets" is attested for the first time in the Praise of the Fathers in Ben Sira. Among the pious of the past are the *šnym ʿśr nby'ym,* "the twelve prophets," who should be praised for giving courage to Jacob and saving the people through a hopeful faith (Sir 49:10). The name "minor prophets" is first found in Augustine's *De civitate dei* (18.29): "the prophet Isaiah is not in the book of the twelve prophets, who are therefore called minor" (*Esaias propheta non est in libro duodecim prophetarum, qui propterea dicuntur minores*). On the basis of this evidence, it has been argued that the texts of the twelve prophets were collected on one scroll. It is a well-known fact that the order of the first six books differs among the various traditions. The MT has the order Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah, which has been seen traditionally as based on the historical order of the prophets. The LXX has the order Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah. The number of words in each of the first five books decreases as one moves forward through the LXX. The absence of evidence for the reason for these differences makes it almost impossible to draw any conclusion on the basis of the different order in each tradition.

At the source of this approach stands the work of Martin Noth (1943), who argued that the story of Israel and Judah in the promised land (Joshua–2 Kings) was a well-considered composition applying the norms and regulations of the book of Deuteronomy. Inspired by this work, scholars have been looking for traces of Deuteronomistic redaction in the prophetic books (e.g., Thiel 1973, 1981: Jeremiah; Mendecki 1996: Ezekiel; W. H. Schmidt 1965: Amos; Renaud 1977: Micah; Person 1993: 2 Zechariah). These albeit scattered remarks were influential in the construction of the thesis of a coherent redaction of the Book of the Twelve.

James Nogalski (1993a, 1993b) has been a pioneer in this approach. In his monographs he argues for the presence of similarly phrased building blocks at the end of one prophetic book and the beginning of the next. This phenomenon is then explained by a theory that starting in the exilic period, the "books" of the Minor Prophets were collected and connected by means of redaction. In this approach, the separate books of the Minor Prophets are no longer treated as texts standing on their own, the original core of each book being too small. According to Nogalski (1993a, 123–70), two catchword connections can be found in the beginning and at the end of Micah. He construes Mic 1:1–7 as having a textual connection with Jonah 2:2–10, while in Mic 7:8–20 the hand of a redactor who connected the book of Micah with Nah 1:1–8 can be found. As an editorial halfway house, the original sayings of Micah were edited by a Deuteronomistic redactor.

In the twenty-first century a second wave of redaction-historical approaches to the composition and emergence of the Book of the Twelve arose. These studies propose an even more complicated process behind the present textual form of the Book of the

Twelve (see for instance Zapff 1997; Schart 1998; Floyd 2015, 31–35; Wöhrle 2020; Kessler 2020). Again, I give two examples.

1. Jakob Wöhrle (2008) is of the opinion that the main body of Micah, as a component of the Book of the Twelve, is to be construed as a *Fortschreibung* of an earlier collection of prophetic traditions, the *Fremdvölker-Korpus I* ("collection of oracles concerning the other nations": Mic 1:2; 4:6–7, *10, 12–13; 5:7–8, 14; 6:1; 7:10b–13, 16–17aα). The core of Micah is, in his view, part of a redactional layer throughout the Minor Prophets that he labels *Fremdvölkerschicht II* ("layer containing words against other nations"). After the *Fremdvölker-Korpus I* is expanded with the *Fremdvölkerschicht II,* the *Fremdvölker-Korpus II* is formed. This early Hellenistic composition, according to Wöhrle, stressed the belief that YHWH will descend to the worldly realm in order to liberate his chosen people. Traces of the final redaction of the Book of the Twelve, the *Gnaden Korpus* ("grace-redaction"), can be found in the hymn on divine incomparability (7:18–20).
2. Nicholas Werse (2019, 175–249) put two fundamental questions to the idea that the core of the "Book of the Four" (Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zephaniah) was formed through Deuteronomistic (D) redaction. First, can one identify elements influenced by such activity in those four books that form redactional bridges to the others? And second, are there texts in the individual books that have a literary horizon that extends beyond the individual book? Or, more precisely, ones that are directly related to the other three books of the postulated Book of the Four? A very careful lexical and syntactic analysis leads Werse to the view that the extent of a D-redaction is much smaller than previously assumed. There is too much variety in the phraseology of the D/Dt/Dtr-labeled sections to assume a D-redaction. His own model consists of the idea of four originally independent collections that were brought together in the early exilic "Four Redaction I." The following verses were added to create an updated composition: Hos 4:15aβb, 8:14aβb; Amos 2:4–5, 10–12; 3:1b–2; 5:13; 6:8; 7:9–17; Mic 1:5b—7, 9; 2:3; 6:9aαb, 10–16; Zeph 1:6, 13b; 2:3. A "Four Redaction II" was completed during the late exilic period; only a few verses were added in an attempt to update the collection for an audience of Judaeans who remained in the land after the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem.

Although many remarkable observations have been made in these studies, I am yet to be persuaded by this approach. First, I do not think that biblical writers had a one-dimensional approach to the reality in which they lived. Second, I believe there is a conceptual alternative to the problem of the alternation between prophecies of doom and prophecies of salvation in Micah 2–5 (and I offer it in this commentary). Third, I have my reservations regarding a method that leads to diverse and different results. Besides, the method, and its results—often presented with great confidence—is based on too much uncertainty and too small a corpus to make reliable statistical remarks (see also De Moor 2020, 9–13). Fourth, in the Neo-Assyrian prophetic texts (SAA 9.1, 2), various prophecies of encouragement are brought together in no clear order. The analogy of the Assyrian tablets on which such prophecies are collected and addressed to the kings Ashurbanipal and Esarhaddon regarding varying occasions or situations makes it clear that prophetic traditions could be gathered without bringing them under the rubric of one particular genre. I therefore treat the book of Micah as a text standing on

its own and do not read it as a part of the growing corpus of the Book of the Twelve (see also the reservations of Hillers 1984, 3–4). I do not have any principle or methodological objection to the redaction-historical method, as can be discerned from my proposal to read Micah 6–7 as a text composed later than Micah 1–5. Rather, my reluctance is rooted in the methodological priority of trying to read Micah first as a coherent whole. I consider that the dating of parts of Micah in the exilic-postexilic era was an easy way out of the historiographical problem scholars encounter when researching the complex history of preexilic times.

At the same time, I have some objections to the view that the whole of Micah should be construed as a single coherent construction. In my view, chapters 1 and 6–7 show differences with chapters 2–5, at both the semantic and the conceptual levels. I do not wish to argue that the present book of Micah is the work of a single author (see below). Methodologically, before claiming that a passage, a phrase, or a sentence is a later addition, I prefer to give priority to the question of whether or not we can make sense of the present text. Further, in my opinion, texts and passages that seem to be contradictory at first glance often are coherent at the conceptual level.

VI.
Micah in History

In view of the scarcity of evidence, a biography of Micah is almost impossible to write. The name *mîkāh* is short for *mîkāyāhû* or *mîkā'ēl,* "who is like YHWH/God." In addition to the Micah of the book of Micah, and the quotation of the Micah tradition in Jer 26:18, several people named Micah are known in the Hebrew Bible and in ancient Hebrew inscriptions (Table 1). Both in the narrative order and in the historical realm, these Micah figures are too much at a distance to be considered identical with the prophet. The number of people bearing the name in one of its forms indicates that the name was not uncommon in ancient Israel.

The information in the book of Micah is not very helpful for writing a biography of the prophet. All possible evidence is to be found in Mic 1:1, which is generally seen as stemming from the hand of a redactor (Wellhausen 1963, 134; Hillers 1984, 14–15; Nogalski 1993a, 35–37, 127–28; Kessler 2020, 179; De Moor 2020, 24, 37–48). Micah 1:1 connects the activity of Micah with the reigns of three kings of Jerusalem: Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Assuming this reference is reliable, the life of the prophet can be set in a period of climate change (see "Socioeconomic Insecurity" below) and its implications for the agrarian world.

The reference to Moreshet-Gath as the home of the prophet has given rise to speculation. Liberal scholarship painted Micah with colors of a rural protester with uneducated habits (Wellhausen 1963). Wolff (1978a, 1978b) developed the theory that Micah functioned as an elder in the community of Moreshet. In that capacity, he would

Table 1. The name Micah in the Hebrew Bible and ancient inscriptions

Name form	*Attested*	*Date (BCE) (in the narrative order)*	*Remarks*
A. *mîkāh*	1. Judg 17–18	11th century	Ephraimite
	2. 1 Kgs 22 // 2 Chr 18	9th century	Ben Imla
	3. Mic 1:1, Jer 26:18	8th century	Judaean
	4. 1 Chr 8:34, 9:40	?	Benjaminite son of
	5. 1 Chr 23:20, 24:24	?	Meribbaal
	6. 1 Chr 9:15, Neh 11:22	?	Kohathite son of Uzziel
	7. 1 Chr 5:5	?	Levite grandson of Asaph
	8. 2 Kgs 22:12 // 1 Chr 34:20	7th century	Reubenite son of Shimei Father of Abdon, servant of King Josiah
B. *mykh*	1. Bulla Tell Beit Mirsim 527 (Avigad 1986, no. 27)	7th/6th century	Father of Elijah
	2. Bulla 313 (Avigad 1976, 10)	6th/5th century	
C. *mîkā'*	1. 2 Sam 9:12	10th century	Benjaminite son of Mephiboshet = A.4
	2. 1 Chr 9:15, Neh 11:22	?	Levite grandson of Asaph = A.6
	3. Neh 10:12	5th century	Levite signing Nehemiah's agreement
D. *mîkāyāh*	1. Judg 17–18	11th century	Identical with A.1
	2. 1 Kgs 22 // 2 Chr 18	9th century	Identical with A.2
	3. Jer 36:11, 13	7th/6th century	Secretary of King Jehoiakim
E. *mykyh*	On eleven seals and two ostraca		
F. *mîkā'ēl*			One angel and eleven different humans

have visited Jerusalem on occasion as a delegate for his hometown. Wolff's view puts Micah on par with the leaders in Jerusalem (see also Cook 2004, 195–230; criticized by Jenson 2008, 95). The book of Micah, however, is silent on the societal function of the prophet. In my view, the most that can be said is that Micah, coming from a peripheral agricultural setting, had firsthand knowledge regarding the devastating effects of the changes in the economy of his age for the people living on the land. This last point will be explained below.

As regards the three Judean kings, according to the majority of historians of ancient Israel, they reigned from 756 to 697 BCE, a period of fifty-nine years (Jotham, 756–741; Ahaz, 741–725; and Hezekiah, 729–697). These dates are based on an analysis

of the indications in the Hebrew Bible in combination with synchronisms in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. It should be noted that these dates are not as exact as historians would like them to be. In view of the scarcity of trustworthy evidence, we have to operate with an imperfect construction. More important than a discussion of the years and length of any reign are the major trends characteristic of the period under discussion. In Micah's case, his age was a time of danger and insecurity (Jenson 2008, 96).

Political Insecurity

The period referred to in Mic 1:1 coincides with the extension of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Both in the book of Kings and in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions, references are found regarding the various steps in this process that concern the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (Smith-Christopher 2015, 18–20; De Moor 2015; De Moor 2020, 21–24).

The Assyrian expansion to "the west" started with the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 BCE). Before his reign, Assyrian kings had campaigned in the Levant—for instance Shalmaneser III, who on his Black Obelisk refers to a defeat of *Ia-ú-a,* probably King Jehu (*CoS* 2.113F). These campaigns had more or less the character of raids and did not lead to military or political dominion. In the years before Tiglath-Pileser III, the Assyrians were involved in military struggles with Urartu, north of Assyria. As a side effect, the Northern Kingdom of Israel prospered during the reign of Jeroboam II (786–745 BCE). Things changed after his death, however. Within thirty years, Israel was no longer an independent state but was divided into four Assyrian provinces, each of which had to pay tribute. In the meantime, Judah in the south had become a vassal of Assyria.

Tiglath-Pileser III implemented a new policy. Under his regime, the campaigns were no longer merely raids but rather military operations aimed at establishing Assyrian power over all of the Fertile Crescent. He designed, and his later descendants and successors followed, a system of conquering territories and formerly independent states step by step. In a first step, lands were converted into vassal states. This meant that a local ruler could continue his reign but had to pay an often-extensive tribute to an Assyrian overlord. In doing so, the vassal king received protection from the superpower and the affirmation that his territory would not suffer from an Assyrian campaign. The tribute, however, oppressed the local economy, negatively affecting the lives of the poor and underprivileged (Smith-Christopher 2015, 1–18). The skimming of economic surplus by a foreign power quite often led to a revolt aimed at overthrowing such a heavy yoke. As a rule, the Assyrians reacted to this breach of the vassal relationship with a powerful military campaign, leading to the loss of independence and the exile of parts of the population. The territory was incorporated into the empire as a province, and Assyrian officers and exiles from other parts of the empire were brought to the new province in the hope that a mixed population would be more obedient (see Becking 1992).

In 738 BCE, Tiglath-Pileser III campaigned against the west. His aim was to neutralize an anti-Assyrian coalition in which the Syrian capital Damascus played a leading role. The areas in present-day Syria were turned into Assyrian provinces, as I shall discuss. To ward off a military action against Samaria, King Menahem paid a voluntary tribute of a thousand talents to the Assyrian king (2 Kgs 15:9), thus becoming a vassal (Becking 1992, 3–5).

After the death of Menahem in 738 BCE and the brief reign of his son Pekahiah (736 BCE), Pekah, the son of Remalyahu, seized the throne in Samaria through revolt. He plotted against Assyria with *reṣîn,* Rezin, king of Damascus (Assyrian: *Ra-ḫi-a-nu/ Ra-qi-a-nu;* Aramaic: probably *raḏyan*). Together they tried to persuade King Jotham of Judah to join their coalition. They even laid siege to Jerusalem in order to force Ahaz, the new ruler of Judah, to take sides with them (2 Kgs 15:37, 16:5–20; see also Isa 7–8). Ahaz sought support from Tiglath-Pileser and became a vassal in 734. In his role as protector of his vassal, the Assyrian king campaigned against Aram and Israel in 733–732. He besieged and conquered Damascus, killed its king, and established four Assyrian provinces on the territory of the former vassal (see Becking 1992, 13–15). The campaign against the Northern Kingdom of Israel resulted in the conquest of a variety of Israelite cities, the carrying away into captivity of certain parts of the population, and the establishment of three Assyrian provinces: Gal'ad(d)a, Magidu, and Du'uru. The area around Samaria remained a vassal of Assyria (Becking 1992, 15–20).

The conquest of Samaria is a historiographic riddle. The Hebrew Bible mentions Shalmaneser V (727–722 BCE) as the conqueror (2 Kgs 17:3–6, 18:9–11). This king, however, reigned too short a time to have his deeds inscribed in annals or other historical texts. Thus, his successor, Sargon II, claims about a dozen times to have conquered Samaria, for instance, on a prism from Nimrud:

25. [The inhabitants of Sa]merina, who (28) agreed (25) with a king
26. [hostile (?) to] me not to endure servitude
27. [and not to br]ing tribute
28. [to Ashur] did battle.
29. [Wit]h the power of the great gods, my [lord]s
30. [aga]inst them I foug[ht].
31. [2]7,280 people, together with [their] chariots,
32. and the gods in whom they trusted, as spoil
33. I counted. Two-hundred chariots for [my] royal force
34. I collected from their midst.
35. The rest of them
36. I settled in the midst of Assyria
37. I repopulated Samerina more than before.
38. People from countries, conquered by my hands
39. I brought in it. My commissioner
40. I appointed as governor over them
41. I counted them as Assyrians.

(Sargon II Nimrud Prism IV: 25–41; Gadd 1954, 179–80; *CoS* 2.118)

Most probably, Samaria was conquered twice: first by Shalmaneser V, who was unable to consolidate his victory, and a few years later by the new king, Sargon II. Israel lost its independence, became an Assyrian province, 27,280 people were sent into exile, and people from territories in southern Babylonia were brought to Israel to help till the fields and hence secure the yearly tribute (2 Kgs 17:24). Judah as an obedient vassal did not interfere in political events.

The trade route along the coast of Philistia to Egypt was of great economic interest to the Assyrians because its control secured the constant flow of goods to Assyria.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the Assyrians put much effort into dominating this coastal strip, including two military campaigns against the region. The first took place in 715 BCE (Becking 1992, 54). The so-called Azekah fragment (*CoS* 2.304–5) should be construed as referring to events in 715. The text relates the military revenge of an unknown Assyrian ruler on King Hezekiah of Judah. The Assyrian military action against Jerusalem in Hezekiah's fourteenth year was intended to punish the Judaean king for an act of violence against a Philistine city that had been an Assyrian vassal for several years. Such an act is narrated in 2 Kgs 18:8: "He [= Hezekiah] defeated the Philistines as far as Gaza and its border areas, from watchtower to fortified city." The aim of this campaign, however, was not the conquest of Jerusalem as such, but the strengthening of the border with Egypt. Since Sargon II was occupied with Urartian affairs, it might be possible that a high officer or even the crown prince Sennacherib, who held a high military rank by that time, went to Jerusalem to secure the paying of tribute. I suggest this action was later claimed as a deed of Sargon II when he says in a summary inscription that it was "He who subjected Judah" (*CoS* 2.298–99).

The other well-known campaign of Sennacherib in 701 was also not primarily directed against Judah but was an attempt to regain control over the trade routes to Egypt. His report narrates the process of restoring Assyrian rule over the Philistine cities. In his annals, Sennacherib gives a specific reason why he abandoned the coastal road and besieged Jerusalem. He reports that Hezekiah had taken as prisoner Padi, the former king of Ekron and a vassal of Assyria, who had been thrown in chains by the people and the rulers of Ekron. Sennacherib obviously wanted to liberate his former vassal. During his attack on Jerusalem, Sennacherib captured a great number of Judean cities and strongholds, among which was Lachish. He distributed the territory to his loyal vassals Mitinti of Ashkelon, Padi of Ekron, and Silbel of Gaza. The relatively abundant tribute that Hezekiah paid Sennacherib—thirty talents of gold and three hundred talents of silver (2 Kgs 18:14)—not only liberated Hezekiah from being caught "like a bird in a cage" in Jerusalem, but also served as ransom to regain control over the conquered Judean cities and strongholds (for details, see Becking 2007). As a result, Judah remained a vassal of Assyria until the reign of King Josiah. During the reign of Manasseh, no Assyrian campaigns against Judah were undertaken.

The repetitive Assyrian campaigns against Israel and Judah and the step-by-step transformation of the once independent kingdoms into Assyrian vassal states or provinces are exemplarily described in several publications on the history of Israel (most recently Noll 2013, 260–314; Knauf and Guillaume 2016, 103–18; Wright and Elliot 2017; Younger 2018; Faust 2021). To the assumed original audience of the words of Micah, tribute, conquest, and deportation were real-life experiences (see Waltke 2007, 3–8). To readers in later periods, when Judah was first under Assyrian occupation, was then exiled to Babylon, and later became a province in the Persian Empire, the memory of these humiliations was engraved in their cultural consciousness. It is hermeneutically unsound to try to connect the various prophecies in the book of Micah with specific campaigns (contra De Moor 2015, 2020). The author of Micah is not to be seen as a columnist avant la lettre, given his views on identifiable events. The author is reacting to the trends of his time from a religious point of view.

Socioeconomic Insecurity

On the level of *longue durée,* a shift in the social organization of ancient Israel is observable during Iron Age II. This shift is basically economic. The organization of the production of goods (such as food, clothing, and tools) gradually changed from "domestic" or "kinship-related" into a more tributary system. In other words, a situation in which the people "raised what they ate and ate what they raised" changed into a production of surplus to satisfy the needs of a dominant ruling class—local and soon external. A "domestic" and lineage-based economy has a tendency toward egalitarianism, since that is an appropriate way to survive and to endure. Tributary societies are by implication nonegalitarian. A minority group is dominant over the society and wants to continue and extend its control. In the case of Israel, the long-term shift from one form to the other was accelerated by the contact that Israel had with competitive (e.g., Phoenicia and Syria) and dominant (Assyria) powers during Iron Age II (Bendor 1996, 207–83; McNutt 1999, 143–81; Boer 2015; Boloje 2018, 637–40; Coomber 2021, 208–10). These powers were, on the one hand, implementing a system of trade at the level above the local market and, on the other, creaming off the economic surplus of the local communities.

This shift was concurrent with a twofold climate change around 700 BCE. Climate is not constant, and the eighth century BCE was a period of change. Up to 700, the global temperature rose, but data from the Greenland Ice Sheet Project show a decline of temperature after 700 (Meese et al. 1994). This implies that during the last decades of the eighth century BCE, lack of rainfall would have negatively influenced agrarian production but that after 700, the circumstances changed for the better. Droughts could well have been the reason farmers were impoverished. A warmer climate often supports the spread of bubonic plague. This was the case in medieval Europe, but also in 707 BCE in western Asia. There is evidence that in that year a *mūtāmu,* Akkadian for "deadly disease or big death" (*CAD* M/2, 296–97), scourged the Assyrian Empire (see SAA 1.171.14, 1.180.10′–12′; Babylonian Chronicle I ii:5; Gallagher 1999, 267–68). Such an epidemic could have had a destructive effect on agriculture, limiting food production and leading to weakening people's resilience. Dendrochronological data from the ancient Near East during that period show a comparable pattern, with less biomass before 700 BCE and increasingly more after (Pearson and Stuiver 1986). The Siloam inscription (*CoS* 2.28), written in the days of King Hezekiah, gives evidence of the importance of the water supply in Jerusalem around that time.

Some Judeans profited from economic changes, while others became impoverished. The internal solidarity of the community based on lineage units and inherited land (Cook 2004, 81–86) slowly faded away. Prophets like Amos and Micah criticized this process (Ward-Lev 2019, 3–13).

Radine (2012; see also Schütte 2016, 12–14; De Moor 2020) connects the growing economic tensions in and around Jerusalem with the supposed influx of inhabitants from Samaria after the Assyrian conquest of that city (see Finkelstein 2008, 2015). Although there is not much real evidence for this influx—the extension of Jerusalem and Lachish could also be the effect of the growth of the local population—it should be noted that the economic change depicted above was already occurring before the fall of Samaria.

Religious Insecurity

The Assyrians did not have much interest in disturbing local cults. Their main target was economic: control over the long-distance trade routes to Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula. There is no evidence that the Assyrians imposed their religion on conquered territories. The Assyrian religion was imposed only on the vassal king and his court and may have been restricted to contexts of diplomatic encounter (Cogan 1974; Berlejung 2012).

An argument against this view has been seen in the altar that Ahaz of Judah made after a model that he saw when visiting Tiglath-Pileser III in Damascus after his submission to the Assyrian king as a vassal. During this visit Ahaz saw an altar and subsequently had a copy of it built for the temple of YHWH in Jerusalem, replacing the bronze altar made by Solomon. The former altar was moved to a different spot and henceforth functioned as a site for royal divination (2 Kgs 16:10–16). Traditionally, the erection of this new altar has been understood as a response to the wishes of the Assyrian king and construed as a means to install the cult of Ashur in Jerusalem; however, this view is problematic. The text in 2 Kings does not label the altar as Assyrian; it just mentions its existence. The text also assigns to Ahaz the initiative for building the altar. Within the text, he is not forced to act by the Assyrian king. In the reports on the reforms by Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:4) and Josiah (2 Kgs 23:11–14), the altar of Ahaz is not mentioned and hence is not seen as idolatrous or foreign per se.

The majority of the population, however, continued to practice their local variations of Yahwism. There are many textual and archaeological signs that the religion in ancient Israel was not always monotheistic or monolatrous. The fact that prophets continuously warn against the cult(s) of "other deities" can only be read as a signal that these deities were venerated by many Israelites and Judeans. Archaeology has revealed three important groups of evidence for polytheism in ancient Israel. The first group is formed by the various standing stones throughout Israel/Canaan from the Middle and Late Bronze periods and continuing into the late Iron Age (Mettinger 1995). These stones, referred to as *maṣṣēbôt* in the Hebrew Bible, quite often are found in sets of three or five, mainly in a cultic context close to the city gates. These standing stones represent local deities and deified ancestors. They functioned in the cult of the ancestors and as divine guarantors for the judicial processes in "the gate" that were instrumental for the continuation of city and clan (see Dijkstra 2001; Dever 2014). The second group is the so-called pillar figurines. About a thousand of these have been found from all periods of ancient Israel, including the Assyrian period. These figurines, which represent a nude goddess with prominent breasts, should be construed to indicate that in the religious symbol system at the family level, a deity called Asherah played an important role (see Dijkstra 2001; Dever 2014). At this level she is a protecting *dea nutrix* that could be evoked in times of danger and despair, especially during birth. The breasts of pillar figurines should not be construed as erotic symbols but as a reference to the heavenly milk that Mother Earth gives to the poor and the needy. Ian Wilson (2012) has argued that the figurines represent one attempt to maintain local identity as the Neo-Assyrian Empire rapidly expanded and absorbed much of the region. He is correct in seeing them as a sign of the continuation of local polytheistic lore, but I doubt that they had an anti-Assyrian impact. Furthermore, paleo-Hebrew inscriptions clearly refer to the veneration of Asherah as the consort of YHWH (Dijkstra 2001; Meshel, Aḥituv, and

Freud 2012). The third inscription from Khirbet el-Kom indicates the veneration of a goddess as the consort of YHWH (*CoS* 2, 52). This late-eighth-century text was excavated not far from Jerusalem.

Religion, however, is more than merely knowing the name of the divine being. Any religion is a system that contains a set of beliefs, cultural and moral values, and a worldview that expresses itself in a variety of rituals quite often based on shared mythology (Bowie 2000). A religion expresses itself not only in creeds, but also in a moral code. A distinction between "moral code" and "religion" is characteristic of a modern, Western, disenchanted view of reality. In our secular society we are accustomed, even required, to separate the religious from the secular. However, there are strong indications that in the minds of the ancient Israelites, these dimensions were intertwined (Otto 1994; Miller 2012, 1–9; Ward-Lev 2019). The Torah underlines time and again that there is no such thing as "merely" legal issues; matters of law are always bound up with a relationship with YHWH. Profiting economically at the expense of others, for instance, was seen as an action against the moral code. Lopsided growth leading toward too great a socioeconomic difference between people was assumed to be addressed by an act of compensation (Deut 15, Lev 25). Micah did disagree with the moral conduct of those who prospered while others became poor. To him, this conduct was not the correct expression of Israelite religion.

For those who are convinced that the book of Micah was composed in its entirety during the Persian period, the references to Neo-Assyrian armies and eighth-century poverty are no more than memories of the past that are used to diagnose the situation in Yehud under Persian rule. The gap between rich and poor therefore would refer to the situation described in Nehemiah 5 (Ben Zvi 2000; O'Brien 2015). It is of course possible to read the social criticism of Micah against the crisis described by the author of Nehemiah, but that does not imply this was the original context.

VII.

Forms and *Gattungen*

Messages can be molded in a variety of ways. The authors of the prophetic books in the Hebrew Bible had at their disposal a number of language-shaped forms to communicate their ideas (see Westermann 1964, 1991, who, however, pays attention only to prophecies of doom). The book of Micah includes a variety of these forms:

—After the heading, chapter 1 opens with the description of a *theophany* (1:2–4). Such a description of the coming of divinity from a geographical location is a general ancient Near Eastern literary form (Jeremias 1965; Stansell 1988, 9–38; Scriba 1995; Savran 2003; DeLapp 2018). Elements in this form are (1) the coming of the deity from a heavenly abode to

earth, and (2) the effects of this coming into the world of nature with features that go beyond the ordinary.

—*Prophecies of doom* are found throughout Micah (1:5–7, 3:5–8, 6:9–12, 7:11–13; see van der Woude 1976, 253–58).

—A *lament* is present in 1:10–16 (King 1988, 58–60). Using wordplays on the names of a series of cities in the Shephelah region, the author bewails this area regarding its future.

—A *Wehruf,* or *woe oracle,* is clearly present in 2:1–5. This term refers to a literary genre in which a person or a group is lamented before it is punished. The genre elaborates on the mourning cry that greets the deceased. In applying this form to the living, an author classifies the life of a person or a group as having reached a dead end: a mourning cry will be their inevitable fate (Westermann 1964, 137–42; 1999, 190–98; Janzen 1972; Hillers 1984, 31; Gignilliat 2019, 102–3). A woe oracle is traditionally made up of three elements: (1) an address, (2) an accusation, and (3) an announcement of the impending doom.

—A *Disputationswort,* or *disputation,* is present at 2:6–11. The opponents of Micah try to silence him by claiming that he does not speak on God's behalf. Micah counters their argument with a prophecy of doom (Westermann 1964, 144–45; 1991, 201; Wagenaar 2001a, 220–29).

—*Oracles of salvation* are found throughout Micah (2:12–13, 4:1–5, 4:6–7, 4:9–14, 5:6–8, 7:14–17; Wagenaar 2001a, 230–40, 261–73, 273–74, 278–89, 301–5; Westermann 1987, 17–18, 81–84).

—*Oracles of collective judgment* can be found in 3:1–4 and 3:9–12. Such an oracle consists of four elements after an introduction: (1) an accusation, (2) a further development of the accusation, (3) an announcement of God's intervention, and (4) a description of the effect of the divine intervention. In 3:1–4 the fourth element is absent, while 3:9–12 does not mention the third, although the language used in the section implicitly refers to an intervention on God's behalf (Westermann 1964, 120–26; 1991, 169–76; Wagenaar 2001a, 241–49).

—Micah 4:8 and 5:1–4a can be classified as *Stammessprüche,* or *tribe sayings*. Such sayings are addressed to one of the tribes or clans of ancient Israel that is summoned to praise in gratitude for divine favor (Wagenaar 2001a, 274–78). In Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33, and Judges 15, a series of such sayings can be found.

—Micah 5:4b–5 is an *embedded incantation* against an attacking enemy (Wagenaar 2001a, 294–300).

—The genre of 5:9–13 is clearly an example of the *Bannformel,* or *extermination formula* (see Wagenaar 2001a, 305–15).

—Micah 6:1–5 is classified by Westermann (1964, 101, 143; 1991, 199) as a *Rechtsverhandlung,* or *legal procedure*. Others label this unit as a lawsuit (Harvey 1967, 54–61; Limburg 1969; Ramsey 1977; Cruz 2016, 121–64; Dempster 2017: 153–56) or prophetic admonition (Tångberg 1987, 57–61). Since both labels are vague depictions of a form and the listed elements do not clearly occur, I prefer to see Mic 6:1–2 as an appropriation

of an ancient literary form to function as a hermeneutical matrix in a changed situation (with Smith-Christopher 2015, 188–92).

—A *didactic summary* of the past is found at 6:3–5.

—Micah 6:6–8 contains a *dialogue* on morality.

—In 6:13–16, the prophecy of doom for the leaders of Judah is dressed in the form of a series of *futility clauses*. They indicate that a divine punishment will break the expected chain of cause and consequence (Quick 2018).

—A second *woe oracle* is present at 7:1–7.

—Micah 7:8–13 is a mixed bag. The section opens with an expression of confidence (7:8–10) enveloped in a summons to the enemy not to rejoice at the fate of the "I" character. The second part, 7:11–13, forms an oracle of doom for the enemy (see van der Woude 1976, 253–58).

—The book closes with a *summons to praise* the incomparable, gracious deity YHWH (7:18–20).

The book of Micah in its entirety gives the impression of a patchwork of a variety of forms that is not well organized. As discussed above, the fact that oracles of doom and oracles of salvation are placed back-to-back has led to scholarly debate about the complex growth of the book. In my view, form-critical distinctions do not by implication lead to literary-critical or redaction-historical separations. The concatenation of a variety of forms for communication should primarily be seen as a strategy of discourse, as I undertake to demonstrate in the following pages.

VIII.

A New Proposal

I propose that after the title the book of Micah consists of three parts:

1. Micah 1: An original prophecy
2. Micah 2–5: A prophetic futurology based on a variety of reworked sayings from the Micah tradition
3. Micah 6–7: A treatise dating to the period before the reform of Josiah

Micah 1: An Original Prophecy

The first chapter of the book of Micah, in its Masoretic version, has often been seen to be in a state of disorder. Several proposals have been made to reconstruct a more original or fluent text. The present text in the MT, especially of 1:10–16, is thought to require some form of "correction" in order to be understood. Since I am not convinced by the various proposals toward emending the text (see below), I read the text as it stands. The chapter starts with a description of a theophany and moves to a prophecy of doom containing threatening puns on place names. I read this chapter as a prophetic reflection

upon the sack of Samaria that functions as a mirror for the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem, especially for those who believe that divine election has made them invulnerable to threat. Living on the periphery of the Shephelah is also no guarantee of shelter from the forthcoming doom. As Hagstrom (1988, 48) noted, there is a major break in the "linear continuity" between 1:16 and 2:1 (unconvincingly challenged by Weingart 2019). I assume a source-critical division between chapters 1 and 2–5, although both sections go back to an eighth-century BCE prophet.

Micah 2–5: A Prophetic Futurology Based on a Variety of Reworked Sayings from the Micah Tradition

The second part, Micah 2–5, is well known for its conceptual and compositional problems. In these chapters, an interplay between prophecies of doom and prophecies of salvation can be found, as the following example illustrates. The panorama on peace in 4:1–5 is not only an example of the beauty of Hebrew poetry, but also the expression of hope for a flourishing future. The unit, however, brings us to the core of the conceptual and compositional problems. The main problem can be brought into relief by referring to the final words of the previous chapter. Micah 3:12 contains a fierce prophecy of doom that contrasts with 4:1–5.

This contrast is an example of the enigmatic alternation of the themes of hope and doom in Micah. This interchange has been interpreted in various ways. Classical nineteenth-century exegesis starting with Stade (1881, 1883, 1884) and afterward constructed a literary-critical or redaction-historical solution, as outlined above.

Building on the work of two nineteenth-century scholars (Ewald 1867, 500–502; Roorda 1869), van der Woude (1969) elaborated an ingenious theory (adopted by Boogaart 1981; Strydom 1988; Alfaro 1989; Utzschneider 1999, 59–168). In his opinion, chapters 2–5 of the present book of Micah contain the text of a dialogue between the pessimistic prophet Micah and some optimistic pseudo-prophets. Cruz (2016, 65–71) elaborates upon this view by hinting at conflicting metaphors in chapters 3–5: the image of the plowshare is difficult to harmonize with the metaphor of threshing. Although Cruz interprets these tensions as signs of internal dialogue in the section, he does not adopt van der Woude's view (for a negative assessment of this view, see Smith-Christopher 2015, 36–37).

A sociological model has been developed by Kessler (1999, 58–61). In his view the sections should be seen as oracles directed to different groups in society: doom for the rich and hope for the bereaved. It is unclear whether he has the original composition or the final redaction in view.

A conceptual solution has been offered by Wessels (2013), who assumes that the multidimensionality of the prophetic announcements reflects the two sides of the testimony on God in the Hebrew Bible: benign and vengeful.

My own view elaborates upon the idea of Mays (1976, 4–9), who assumed a dramatic development in Micah 1–3. After a period of destruction, a time of blessings will follow. I combine this lead with the position of Hillers, who characterizes Micah as a prophet full of hope for a new era. In Hillers's (1984, 4–8) view, Micah foresees the coming of times of trouble before the onset of a golden messianic age. R. L. Smith (1984, 37) offers the view that 3:9–12 connects to an immediate future, while 4:1–5 pictures a later stage in history.

On the one hand, the prophet Micah had to bring a message of doom. This was necessary within the framework of his time: the people of Israel, or at least the leading elite, had damaged the relationship with God by transgressing the religious and social codes implied in that relationship. At the same time, Micah knows about and believes in God's love and divine salvation. Both doom and salvation are brought together in a two-level prophetic message. The first level is the prophecy of immediate doom as punishment. Doom, however, is not God's final word. In a more distant future, Israel will be created anew within the framework of God's salvation.

In the meantime, a pattern has been developed that is characteristic of prophetic futurology. This pattern might be called the chastening pattern. Threat, conquest, downfall, exile, and the like are interpreted as divine acts in history. They are not, however, the end of time or history. Through the humiliation that results from chastisement, a new future is possible. This future can be reached by conversion or by new deeds of the deity, as in the proclamation of Deutero-Isaiah. The idea of Hillers (1984) that Micah foresaw a utopian age and that of Smith (1984) that 4:1–5 hints at a later stage in history should be connected with the concept of history underlying Micah 2–5.

A set of ancient Near Eastern texts presents the past as an alternation of "good times" and "bad times." After a "bad time/period of doom," a "good time/period of prosperity" will arrive, often through the deeds of a "prince of peace" or other messianic figure. I discuss several texts that illustrate this pattern.

A very interesting text in this connection is the Akkadian Prophecy A. In this text, history and the future are periodized by the reigns of a great number of kings and princes who will rule. The rule of a bad prince is indicated as follows:

> The sanctuaries of the great gods will be confused.
> The defeat of Akkad will be decreed.
> There will be confusion, disorder and unfortunate events in the land.
> The great will be made small.
>
> (KAR 421 ii:11′–14′; Grayson and Lambert 1964, 12–16; Longman 1991, 241)

The reign of a good king is depicted in the reverse image:

> He will re-establish the regular offering for the Igigi-gods which was cut off.
> Favorable winds will blow
> Abundance in the midst of [. . .]
> Cattle [will lie down] safely in the steppe.
>
> (KAR 421 iii:1′–8′; Grayson and Lambert 1964, 14; Longman 1991, 241)

The text in its present though broken form ends with the depiction of a bad prince in whose reign

> [the one who was rich] will stretch out his hand to the poor
> [. . .] the mother will speak what is right to her daughter.
> [. . .] advice to the land, advice [. . .] consume the land
> The king will bring hard times on the land.
>
> (KAR 421 Rev. ii:16–19; Grayson and Lambert 1964, 14; Longman 1991, 242; see Notes at Mic 7:6)

In the fictional autobiography of the god Marduk, the disastrous situation in Babylon after the deity had to abandon his country is described in graphic language. After he had fulfilled his days in exile, the deity went back to Babylon, where circumstances changed for the better (Borger 1971; Longman 1991, 234; *CoS* 1, 149).

The theme of reversal is present not only in Akkadian literary predictive texts, but also elsewhere in the ancient Near East. The hymn that was composed on the occasion of the coronation of the neo-Assyrian king Ashurbanipal is full of language and metaphors that express the traditional Mesopotamian view on the just king (SAA 3.11; *CoS* 1, 142). After the singing of this hymn, the king had to pronounce a blessing before Shamash, a blessing that recalls the themes from the loyalty oaths that Esarhaddon had concluded with his vassals shortly before his death and thus not long before Ashurbanipal's inauguration.

In the Egyptian admonitions of Ipuwer, from the first intermediate period, the imagery of a world turned topsy-turvy functions as an indication of a "bad time" (Ipuwer 8, 1–5; *CoS* 1, 96). In this connection, attention should be paid to the well-known Cyrus Cylinder in which the Persian king is presented as a good king ending the bad reign of Nabonidus; he brings peace to Babylon and carries back the exiled statues of the Babylonian gods.

In Micah 2–5, this conceptual framework as such is not present. The author of these chapters does not represent the past as an interplay of good times and bad times. Neither are there significant parallels at the level of words and phrases between the text of Micah 2–5 and the ancient Near Eastern texts just discussed. Rather, the parallel between Micah 2–5 and these texts can be found in the orientation of Micah 2–5. The author of these chapters does not cite or quote the set of texts mentioned above, but he projects on the future of Judah and Israel the idea of a salvific era after a period of doom. When the text is looked at in this way, a significant reading of the textual unit emerges: To the author of the book of Micah, the exile does not equal the eschaton. The approaching exile of the inhabitants of Judah and the ruin of the city of Jerusalem—both took place some 125 years after the prophet Micah is generally assumed to have uttered his words—are not the end of history and certainly not seen as the end of divine action and sustenance (Jenson 2008, 100–101). This implies that a message can be read in Micah that is consoling for the *personae miserae* of all places and in all times (Kessler 1999, 53–70). My view also accounts for the tensions signaled by Cruz (2016): some metaphors fit the ideology and phraseology of the first transformation—from instability to doom—while others are part of the language of the second—from hopelessness to hope.

Micah 6–7: A Treatise Dating to the Period Before the Reform of Josiah

In the final chapters of the book of Micah, a different voice can be heard. In my opinion, a clear breach of discourse between chapters 5 and 6 is observable. This shift is discernible in various ways:

—At the level of *unit delimitation*. Markers in ancient manuscripts indicate when a new section has begun (De Moor 2005; 2020, 277–80).

—At the level of the *literary forms,* or *Gattungen*. The lawsuit or admonition followed by a didactic reflection on the past and a dialogue on morality cannot be seen as the expected continuation of the oracles of doom and salvation in Micah 2–5.

—At the level of *phraseology*. Van der Woude (1971) has listed seven features of words and phrases in chapters 6–7 that do not match the language in chapters 2–5 (adopting Burkitt 1926; accepted by Strydom 1988; Wagenaar 2001a, 49–54; Gruber 2007, 2–3).

—At the level of the *description of God.* Micah 6–7 contains language and metaphors that present YHWH as a divine being with a variety of emotions varying between anger and comfort, an element that is absent in chapters 2–5.

—At the level of *social criticism*. In Micah 6–7, the critique of the ruling elite is confined to the elements of bribery and the manipulation of weights and measures.

I therefore disagree with two groups of scholars: (1) those who construe the book of Micah as a coherent whole and hence do not separate chapters 6–7 from 2–5, and (2) those who construe the final form of the book as the result of a complex process of redactional activity (see above).

The arguments of those who read Micah as a coherent whole (for instance Hillers 1984; Hagstrom 1988; Waltke 2007; Dempster 2017; Gignilliat 2019) are not convincing, since they do not account for the differences mentioned here. Those who opt for a redaction-historical solution to the problems of Micah see the language of chapters 6–7 as influenced by Deutero-Isaiah and construe the remarks on the strengthening of the walls in 7:11 as a reference to the activities of Nehemiah. In addition, they interpret connections with the books of the other minor prophets as signs of redactional activity in order to compose the Book of the Twelve (Cook 1991; Nogalski 1993a, 141–44; Jeremias 2007, 119–21; Wöhrle 2008, 610; Banister 2018, 39–41). Their arguments, too, do not persuade me, especially since they do not account for the literary and conceptual coherence that in my view is observable in Micah 6–7.

The remaining question is when was Micah 6–7 composed? Dating texts is a hermeneutical rather than a historical enterprise. It is in fact an exercise in finding the best lock in which the key of the text would fit. Thus, every proposal for a date of Micah 6–7 is tentative and debatable.

Van der Woude's (1971) proposal that Deutero-Micah should be depicted as a prophet from northern Israel living before the fall of Samaria (see also Shaw 1993) is difficult to maintain in view of the Judahite context supposed by the two chapters.

Important elements in the text of Micah 6–7 are

—The people's acceptance of their guilt
—The misleading role of icons as representations of the divine
—The harshness of foreign domination
—The longing for a restoration of the veneration of only one God

In my view, this key fits the lock of the era of King Manasseh (687–643 BCE), when Assyrian dominance and religious trespasses formed a delivery room for the birth of the YHWH-alone movement. I therefore propose to read these chapters as a pseud-

epigraphic text against the historical horizon of the times preceding the reign of King Josiah (see already Ewald 1867, 501–27; Willi-Plein 1971, 155; and Renaud 1977, 425–29; Schart 1998, 190–200, attributes the whole of Mic 6 to the D-redaction). Then the text would share the themes of hope and self-reflection so characteristic of those days when hope was growing for the restoration of the Davidic dream of unity and for the return of the exiled Samarians (see also the slightly later book of Nahum). In the meantime, the author is not silent about the social and religious trespasses of the people living in and around Jerusalem. He makes clear that the admission of guilt is the first step on the road to redemption. An interesting question is why these chapters were added to the book of Micah. Most probably, the authors/redactors construed the events in the time of Josiah as an occasion to appropriate the words of the prophet.

IX.

Reading Micah in 2021

In the final year of my writing this commentary, the world was stirred by the coronavirus pandemic. Millions of people died of COVID-19, even more got seriously ill, people lost their jobs, and nearly everyone's life was restricted and characterized by loneliness. All this did not change my views on the book of Micah, but a question kept popping up: How would Micah react to this worldwide disaster, including the uncertainty of the ruling elite about taking the correct measures, and the resistance of various citizens to their directives?

This is a hermeneutical question, and the answer is connected to the question of whether or not we still see YHWH as controlling, cursing, and blessing the lives of individuals and nations, as is characteristic of Janet Warren's (2021) Christian understanding of COVID. I myself do not belief in a divine agency behind the crisis. I do not believe that COVID-19 is God's reaction to the sins and transgressions of humankind—of whatever character. I also do not believe in conspiracy theories (Isa 8:12; Jovančević and Milićević 2020; Uscinski and Enders 2020). I am not in dread of the secret plans of any group of people. I do believe, however, that such a pandemic is part and parcel of our universe and its endless possibilities.

There are a few reasons why this worldwide pandemic can be connected to the message of Micah, such as the globalization of the economy that disrupts local markets, the greed of the rich and mighty, the detrimental harm to the poor and the powerless, the loneliness of so many people. The COVID pandemic can be seen and interpreted as a warning. I sincerely hope that it will lead to a change of behavior (see Dein 2021).

In his book *God and the Pandemic,* N. T. Wright (2020) interprets the coronavirus crisis in light of an important biblical theme: renewal after devastation. This view concurs with my basic interpretation of Micah 2–5. The inhabitants of Jerusalem and its surroundings have to accept the impending exile and ruin. They should be aware of

their role in the crisis that inevitably leads to the devastation of Jerusalem. At the same time, they may hope for a new future in which they will be more responsible as stewards of creation and protectors of the weak and vulnerable. They—but also, we—are summoned "to do justice, to love kindness, and to behave prudently by walking with your God" (Mic 6:8; see Lum 2021, 26–31; Kabongo 2021).

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TRANSLATION

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The Superscription

1 [1]The word of YHWH
that came to Micah, the Morashtite,
in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah,
that he envisioned
with regard to Samaria and Jerusalem.

Part I: A Distorting Prophecy

YHWH'S Epiphany

[2]Listen, all these nations!
Notice, O earth and its fullness!
The Lord God will be a witness among you
from his holy temple.
[3]For, look, YHWH is coming out of his dwelling;
he descends and treads upon the high places of the earth.
[4]The mountains are melting underneath him
and the valleys are ripped open
like wax before the fire,
like water cascading down from a slope.

For the Transgressions of Israel and Judah

[5]All this will happen because of the transgression of Jacob
and because of the sins of the house of Israel.
What is the transgression of Jacob other than Samaria?
What are the high places of Judah but Jerusalem?
[6]I will make Samaria into a heap of stones in the field,
a place for a vineyard.
I will hurl down her stones into the valley
and I will expose her foundations.

[7]All her graven images will be crushed.
All her <wooden poles> will be burned with fire.
I will assign all her idols to devastation
for they were gathered from the wages of a prostitute.
To the wages of a prostitute they shall return.

Who Is Lamenting?

[8]Because of this, I will mourn,
and howl,
and go barefoot
and naked.
I will make a wailing like the jackals
and mourning like the daughters of an ostrich.
[9]For her wounds are incurable,
since it has come to Judah
and has touched the gate of my people,
<even to> Jerusalem.

Wailing Wordplays on the Shephelah

[10]Do not proclaim in Gath!
Certainly, do not cry!
In Beth-le-Aphrah
roll yourself in dust.
[11]Go on your way, inhabitant of Shaphir,
shameful nakedness!
Do not go out, inhabitant of Zaanan.
The lamentation of Beth-ha-Ezel:
"He will take from you his support."
[12]For the inhabitant of Maroth
trembles incredibly
since evil from YHWH
will descend to the gate of Jerusalem.
[13]Connect the chariot to the team of horses,
inhabitant of Lachish!
She is the beginning of the sin
for daughter Zion,
because in you were found
the transgressions of Israel.
[14]Therefore, give a parting gift
to Moreshet-Gath.
The houses of Achzib
will be a deception to the kings of Israel.
[15]Once more, I will bring a conqueror to you,
inhabitant of Maresha.

He will come to Adullam,
the glory of Israel.
16 Shear and shave
because of the children of your delight.
Enlarge your baldness like that of an eagle
because they will go away from you into exile.

Part II: A Prophetic Futurology

Woe Oracle

2 1 Woe to you who devise wickedness
and who plan evil on their beds,
who execute it by the light of the morning,
because it is in the power of their hands.
2 When they desire fields,
they rob,
and houses,
they take.
They extort a fellow and his house,
a man and his inherited land.
3 Therefore, thus says YHWH:
"Behold, I will devise an evil against this clan
out of which you cannot remove your necks.
You shall not walk haughtily
because this will be an evil time.
4 On that day, one will recite a saying over you,
there will be bitter wailing, weeping,
namely:
'We are completely destroyed.
The portion of my people, he changed.
How he has removed it from me!
He has divided our fields among the rebellious!'
5 You, however, will have no one
who will cast by lot the measuring line in the community of YHWH."

Daunting Defense

6 "You shall not preach!"
they preach;
"they shall not preach on these matters;
he will not turn away the ignominies.
7 May that be proclaimed, house of Jacob?
Is the spirit of YHWH that impatient?
Are these his doings?"
Are my words not good for those who walk straight?

Accumulating Accusations

[8]Recently, my people stood up as an enemy!
You stripped off a mantle of majesty
    from those who pass by in trust,
    turning away from war.
[9]You expel the women of my people
    from the house of her comfort.
You take away from their children
    my glory, forever.
[10]Arise and go!
    For this is not a resting place.
Since being polluted, she is pregnant,
    with a grievous labor pain.
[11]If a man, chasing emptiness,
    was deceiving with falsehood:
        "I preach to you concerning wine and strong drink!,"
he would be the preacher of this people.

Gathering of the Scattered Flock

[12]I will certainly collect you completely, Jacob,
    I will certainly gather the remnant of Israel,
I will set them together like sheep in the sheepfold,
    like a flock in the midst of its pasture.
They will bustle with humanity.
[13]The one who made a breach goes up before them.
    They break through, pass the gate,
        and go out through it.
Their king will pass through before them,
    namely YHWH, at their head.

Leaders Accused

3 [1]And I said:
    "Hear now, heads of Jacob and rulers of Israel!
        Should you not know what justice is,
    [2]you who hate the good and love the evil,
        you who tear off the skin from them
            and the flesh from their bones?"
    [3]Because they ate the flesh of my people,
    stripped off the flesh from them
        and broke their bones.
They spread it out like in a pot,
    like flesh in the midst of a kettle.
[4]Then, they will cry out to YHWH,
    but he will not answer them.

At that time, he will conceal his face from them
because of the evil deeds they have done.

Prophets Accused

[5]Thus says YHWH concerning the prophets
who cause my people to do wrong,
who, when their teeth have something to bite
proclaim "Peace!,"
but against the one who does not give them anything in their mouth
they consecrate a war.
[6]It will be night for you, however, without vision
and there will be darkness over you, without divination.
The sun will go down over the prophets
and the day will grow dark over them.
[7]The seers will be ashamed
and the diviners confounded.
They will all wrap themselves up to the moustache
since no answer will come from God.
[8]On the other hand, I am full of power
and the spirit of YHWH, of judgment and strength
to give notice to Jacob of his transgression
and to Israel of its sin.

Consequences

[9]Hear this now,
heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel,
who abhor justice
and twist everything that is straight,
[10]who build Zion with blood
and Jerusalem with injustice.
[11]Her heads judge for a bribe.
Her priests instruct for a price.
Her prophets divine for silver.
Nevertheless, they lean on YHWH, saying:
"Is YHWH not in our midst?
Evil will not come upon us!"
[12]Therefore, on your account,
Zion will be plowed into a field.
Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins.
The mountain of the house will become high places with forest.

Peace: A Panorama

4 [1]In days to come
the mountain of the temple

will be established as head of the mountains,
    and will be raised above the hills.
Nations will come streaming to it;
    [2]many nations will walk.
They will say:
    "Let us go up the mountain of YHWH
        to the house of Jacob's God.
    May he teach us about his ways;
        we will walk in his paths.
    For from Zion will come forth the instruction,
        the word of YHWH will come from Jerusalem."
[3]He will settle disputes between the nations,
    and reprove the great powers far away.
They will hammer their swords into hoes
    and their spears into pruning knives.
A nation shall not raise a sword against a nation,
    never train for war again.
[4]Each will sit under his vine and his fig tree,
    and no one will startle them.
For the mouth of YHWH of hosts has spoken.
[5]Though all the nations will go,
    each in the name of its god,
we will go in the name of YHWH, our God,
    for ever and ever.

A Future for the Lame

[6]On that day—oracle of YHWH—
    "I will collect the lame
and I will gather the banished,
    those whom I treated badly.
[7]I will set the lame as a remnant
    and those removed as a mighty nation."
YHWH will reign over them on the mountain of Zion
    from now and forevermore.

A Twofold Transformation

[8]You, tower-of-the-flock, hill of daughter Zion,
    to you will come and be brought
the former rule,
    the kingship over the daughter of Jerusalem.
[9]Now, why do you cry loudly?
    Is there no king with you?
—or has your counselor perished—
    that pain has gripped you like a woman in labor?

[10]Writhe and burst forth, daughter of Zion,
like a woman in labor.
For now, you have to leave the city,
settle in a field
and come to Babylon.
There, you will be saved!
There, YHWH will redeem you from the hand of your enemies!

A Reversal of Fates

[11]Now, many nations are gathered around you
who are saying:
"Let her be defiled!
Let our eyes gaze on Zion!"
[12]However, they do not realize the considerations of YHWH.
They do not fathom his counsel.
He will collect them like grain on a threshing floor.
[13]Arise and tread, daughter of Zion,
for I will give you a horn of iron
and I will give you hoofs of bronze,
that you may pulverize many nations,
devote their profit to YHWH
and their wealth to the lord of all earth.
[14]Now, lacerate yourself, daughter of a troop.
He has laid a siege against us.
With a rod they will strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.

An Unexpected Ruler

5 [1]And you, Bethlehem in Ephratah,
insignificant among the clans of Judah,
from you will go out on my behalf
one who will be a ruler over Israel,
one whose origins are of old
from ancient times.
[2]Therefore, he will abandon them
until the time that she who has to bear has given birth.
The remainder of his brothers will return
to the children of Israel.
[3]He will stand.
He will shepherd
in the strength of YHWH,
in the majesty of the name of YHWH, his God.
They shall dwell,
because then he will be great unto the ends of the earth.
[4]There will be peace!

If Assur enters our land
and treads on our citadels,
we will raise against him seven breakers
and eight human biters.
[5]They will crush the land of Assur with a sword,
the land of Nimrud in its entrances.
He will deliver from Assur
when it comes to our land
and treads on our boundaries.

Good and Bad in One

[6]The remainder of Jacob will be in the midst of great nations
like dew from YHWH,
like abundant rain on vegetation
that does not wait for a man,
or await humankind.
[7]The remainder of Jacob will be in the midst of great nations,
will be like a lion among the animals of the forest,
like a young lion among flocks of sheep,
that when he passes by tramples
and devours with no one to deliver.
[8]You will raise your hand against your adversaries
and all your enemies will be cut off.

Two-Sided Extermination

[9]It will happen on that day—oracle of YHWH—
That I will cut off your horses from your midst
and will destroy your chariots.
[10]I will cut off the cities from your land
and demolish your fortifications.
[11]I will cut off the sorceries from your hand,
and you will have no soothsayers.
[12]I will cut off the graven images and the standing stones from your midst,
and you will no longer bow down to the creation of your hands.
[13]I will pull out the sacred poles from your midst
and exterminate your cities.
[14]But I will take vengeance in anger and fury
on the nations who did not listen.

Part III: A Pro-Josianic Treatise Based on Pseudepigraphy

A Summons to the People

6 [1]Hear now what YHWH is saying:
"Stand up, plead before the mountains

and let the hills hear your voice!"
[2]Hear, O mountains, the plea of YHWH
and the perennial foundations of the earth,
since there is a suit of YHWH
with his people
and with Israel he will dispute.

A Lesson on the Past

[3]"My people, what have I brought on you
and how did I weary you?
Answer me!
[4]For I have brought you up from the land of Egypt,
I have redeemed you out of the house of slaves.
I have sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.
[5]My people, remember
what Balak, the king of Moab, advised
and what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him.
From Shittim to Gilgal
in order to know the righteous acts of YHWH."

A Counter-Merchandising Proposal

[6]"How shall I approach YHWH
and prostrate myself before God on high?
Shall I approach him with burnt offerings,
with one-year-old calves?
[7]Will YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand streams of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my womb for my personal sin?
[8]He has told you, human, what is good
and what YHWH requires of you:
it is to do justice, to love kindness,
and to behave prudently by walking with your God."

Economics Accused

[9]The voice of YHWH calls to the city.
—It is prudence to fear your name.—
Hear, O tribe
and who directs her.
[10]Are there still treasures of transgression in the house of the transgressor
and a scanty and cursed ephah?
[11]Will I remain pure before wicked balances
and before a bag with deceptive weights?

[12]For her rich people are full of violence
and her inhabitants speak falsehood.
Their tongue is deceitful in their mouths.

Futility as Doom

[13]I, myself, will make you sick
by smiting you, ravaging, for your sins.
[14]You will eat,
but you will not be satisfied,
and your vileness will be in your midst.
You will plant a hedge,
but you will not preserve anything,
and what you do preserve
I will give to the sword.
[15]You will sow,
but you will not reap.
You will tread the olive,
but will not anoint yourself with oil;
and press,
but you will not drink wine.
[16]For the statutes of Omri have been kept
and all the work of the house of Ahab.
They have walked according to their disobedient acts.
Therefore, I will make you an object of horror
and her inhabitants an object of abhorrence.
You will bear the reproach of my people.

Lamenting the Curse and Faith Against All Odds

7 [1]Alas to me!
For I have become like one who,
when gathering the harvest fruit
or gleaning the grapes,
finds that there is no bunch to eat,
or a ripe fruit I could desire for myself.
[2]A loyal one is absent from the land
and there is no upright person among humankind.
All lie in wait for blood crimes;
a man hunts his brother with a net.
[3]Hands are qualified to do evil.
The prince and the judge ask for a requital.
A great man talks of his desire.
Thus they construct a case.
[4]The best of them is like a briar;
the most upright, a thorny hedge.

The day of those who watch over you, your visitation will come.
Now their confusion is present.
[5]You should better not rely on your companion
or trust your friend.
From the one who lies in your bosom,
guard the doorways of your mouth.
[6]For a son will have light esteem for a father.
A daughter will rise up against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against a mother-in-law.
The enemies of a man are his own household.
[7]But I will watch expectantly for YHWH.
I will await the God of my salvation.
My God will hear me.

The Depth of Salvation

[8]Do not rejoice over me, my enemy.
Although I have fallen,
I will rise.
Although I dwell in darkness,
YHWH is my light!
[9]I will bear the rage of YHWH,
since I have sinned against him,
until he pursues my suit
and executes justice for me.
He will bring me out to the light.
I will look out for his vindication.
[10]May my enemy see,
may shame cover her
who said to me:
"Where is YHWH your God?"
My eyes will look down on her;
thereupon she will be a trampling place, like mud in the street.
[11]A day is coming when your walls will be strengthened.
That day the order of things will be far away.
[12]That day your attacker will come to you
to divide Assyria and the fortified cities,
to divide from rock to river,
from sea to sea,
from mountain to mountain.
[13]The land shall become like a devastation
before the eyes of its inhabitants,
for the fruits of their deeds.

A New Shepherd

[14]Shepherd your people with your staff
—the flock of your inheritance—
let it dwell in isolation in a forest
in the middle of an orchard.
May they pasture in Bashan and Gilead
as in ancient days.
[15]As in the days of your going out of the land of Egypt
I will show him wonders.
[16]The nations will see and be ashamed
despite all their strength.
They shall hold hand before mouth,
their ears will be deafened.
[17]They will lick dust like a serpent,
like reptiles on the earth, they will come quaking out of their dungeons.
To YHWH, our God, they will come in dread,
and they shall fear you.

The Incomparable God

[18]Who is a god like you
who forgives iniquity,
who passes by the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance;
who does not make firm his anger forever,
because he has a delight in kindness?
[19]He will turn, he will have compassion over us.
He will subdue our iniquities.
You will cast away into the depths of the sea
all their sins.
[20]You will give fidelity to Jacob,
loving-kindness to Abraham,
as you swore to our ancestors
in days long ago.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

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The Superscription (1:1)

1 [1]The word of YHWH
came to Micah, the Morashtite,
in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, kings of Judah,
that he envisioned
with regard to Samaria and Jerusalem.

Introduction

At the head of the book of Micah stands a title. This verse introduces the book to the reader. It is obvious that the superscription was added by a collector of sayings attributed to Micah or by a redactor of the biblical book (Wellhausen 1963, 134; Renaud 1977, 1–8; Kessler 1999, 72–77; Jeremias 2007, 125–27; De Moor 2020, 24, 37–48).

Introductory verses to prophetic books in the Hebrew Bible show much mutual concord, yet each superscription is unique in its details and phrasing. The first verse of Micah contains the traditional elements of the title in a biblical prophetic book (see for instance De Moor 2020, 39–41):

—The name of the sender (YHWH)
—The mediator (Micah)
—The recipients (Samaria and Jerusalem)
—A date (the reign of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings in Jerusalem) linking the text with real-time history

Notes

1:1. *The word of YHWH.* This collocation qualifies the contents of the book as not merely the thoughts and ideas of the human being Micah. The construct chain *dĕbar YHWH* can be construed as either a *genitivus subjectivus* (the word spoken by God) or a *genitivus objectivus* (the word about God). The way in which God and creation

communicate with each other is beyond intellectual comprehension. Suffice it to say that both Israelite and Judaean tradition have kept alive the memory of the divine source of Micah's testimony regarding God and creation (Dempster 2017, 58).

that came to Micah, the Morashtite. The verb used, *hāyāh,* generally "to be," with the preposition *'el* denotes the invisible process of communication between the divine being and the human (*DCH* 2:533). The author of the superscription communicates the view that YHWH took the initiative (De Moor 2020, 38).

The name *mîkāh,* a shortened form of *mîkā'ēl/mîkāyāhû,* "who is like God/YHWH?," occurs more than fifteen times in the Hebrew Bible (see Table 1). Four people are named Micah: Judges 17–18 speak of a man from the tribe of Ephraim, Micah, who made an image of God from the silver he had stolen from his mother; 1 Kings 22 tells the story of a prophet Micaiah the son of Yimla and his curious message to king Jehoshaphat; the genealogies in 1 Chronicles mention Micah the son of Simi (1 Chr 5:5) and Micah the son of Meribbaal (1 Chr 8:34, 9:40). The name is also attested in the list on the Lachish ostracon 11:3 (*CoS* 3.42k). These people are certainly not identical with Micah of Moreshet. The name is sometimes spelled *mîkā'*. Aside from Mic 1:1, Micah the Morashtite is attested in Jer 26:18, where supporters of the prophet Jeremiah defend him by employing the tradition that Micah was known for his prophecies of doom. Historically, nothing is known about the prophet Micah. The confession of the greatness of God in Mic 7:18–20 is built around Micah's name: "Who is a God like you?"

Moreshet apparently was the ancestral home of Micah. The word "Morashtite" was added to his name in order to make clear which Micah is meant. The village was located in the Shephelah, the fertile hills between Philistine territory and the southern Judaean mountains (Dempster 2017, 59; Levin 2018, 447). His ancestral background in the agricultural periphery of Judah has been used by scholars as a peg on which to hang all sorts of speculative ideas about the prophet. Liberal scholarship has painted Micah with the colors of a rural protester with uneducated habits (Wellhausen 1963). Wolff (1978a, 1978b) developed the theory that Micah functioned as an elder in the community of Moreshet. In such capacity, he visited Jerusalem on occasion as a delegate for his hometown. Wolff's view suggests that Micah is equal to the leaders in Jerusalem (see also Cook 2004, 143–230; criticized by Jenson 2008, 95). The book of Micah, however, is silent about the function of the prophet. In my view, the most that can be said is that Micah, coming from a peripheral agricultural setting, had firsthand knowledge of the devastating effects of the changes in the economy of his time for the people living on the land. The LXX reads this line as if Micah were the son of Morashti.

Here and at Jer 26:18, Micah is called "the Morashtite." The village as such is mentioned in only Mic 1:14 and is called Moreshet-Gath there. This place should not be confused with Maresha (Josh 15:44; Mic 1:15; 2 Chr 2:42; 4:21; 11:8; 14:9, 10; 20:37), a city in the lowlands of Judah depicted on the Madeba map (Donner 1992). Moreshet-Gath is most probably to be identified with modern Tell ej-Judeideh in the agricultural hinterland of Gath (or Tell Harassim, proposed by Levin 2002 but corrected by Levin 2018, 447). Moreshet could be identical with *Mu-ú'-ra-aš-ti* (Muḫrašṭu) mentioned in EA 335:17.

in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. According to Wellhausen (1963, 20), the list of kings is a later addition. This view, given without argument, is difficult to evaluate.

The name *yôtām* means "YHWH is perfect." Jotham, the son of Gideon, is famous for his fable of the trees (Judg 9:8–15). Another Jotham is an ancestor of Caleb (2 Chr 2:47). The name *ytm* is attested on some paleo-Hebrew inscriptions and seals (Renz and Röllig 2003, 263, 451). King Jotham is assessed positively by the Deuteronomistic authors of 2 Kgs 15:32–38. The sixteen years of his reign are difficult to date exactly. The chronology of the kings of Judah and Israel is complicated. The remark in 2 Kgs 15:37 on the beginning of the hostilities of Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Samaria can be seen as an indication that already during the reign of Jotham, the Assyrian threat had appeared on the horizon. The coalition between Damascus and Samaria was a reaction to the campaigns and conquests of Tiglath-Pileser III in 738 BCE. Since, however, the reign of Jotham's son Ahaz already had started in 744, the note in 2 Kgs 15:37 should be seen as a dislocated reference to an event in the reign of Ahaz.

The name *'āḥāz* is a shortened form of *yĕhô'āḥāz,* "YHWH holds." On the basis of the synchronisms in 2 Kgs 17:1 and 18:1, as well as the chronological anchor of the first regnal year of Hoshea, king of Samaria, in 731 (through a remark in an inscription by Tiglath-Pileser III [ND 4301+: Rev 12′; see Na'aman 1986]), it is safe to state that Ahaz reigned from 741 to 725 BCE. During his reign, he became a vassal of the Assyrians, most probably as a reaction to the campaign of Tiglath-Pileser III to the coastal strip of the Philistine pentapolis in 734. When Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Samaria tried to enlarge their territory to the south (the Syro-Ephraimite War), Ahaz went to Tiglath-Pileser III for help. Such a request was a prerogative of a vassal. The Assyrian king attacked both Levantine kings. He conquered Damascus and reduced the territory of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to the area around Samaria, which he made a vassal state.

Yĕḥizkiyyāh is an alternative spelling of the name *ḥizkiyyāhû,* "Hezekiah," both meaning "God is strong." The latter form is used in the book of Kings, Proto-Isaiah, and Jeremiah, while the form as given in Mic 1:1 is attested elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible only in Hos 1:1. Its parallel *yĕḥizkiyyāhû,* however, occurs frequently in Chronicles and is also attested in Ezra 2:16. The name form in Mic 1:1 might therefore be an indication that the superscription was added in postexilic times. On the basis of the synchronisms in 2 Kgs 17:1 and 18:1, as well as information from Assyrian sources, Hezekiah reigned from 729 to 697 BCE. He was king in Jerusalem when Samaria fell to the Assyrians. Sennacherib campaigned twice against Hezekiah: in 715 as crown prince and commander of the Assyrian Army (Hezekiah's fourteenth year; Jenkins 1976) and in 701 as an unplanned part of his campaign as king to bring the coastal strip of the Levant and hence the trade routes to Egypt under Assyrian control once again (including the "like a bird in a cage" episode; Becking 2007). The Hebrew Bible claims that Hezekiah conducted a religious reform, purifying the cult (2 Kgs 18:4), but the historicity of this claim is debated.

that he envisioned. The verb *ḥzh,* "to view, perceive, watch, vision," is a relatively archaic word in Biblical Hebrew (Fuhs 1978). Different from the more common *r'h,* "to see," *ḥzh* refers to the perception of the wondrous. The traditional Hebrew word for the religious specialist who was in contact with the divine realm was *ḥōzeh,* "visionary." The verb *ḥzh* denotes the counterpart of the "coming" (*hāyāh*) of the word of YHWH to Micah. This implies that the contact between the divine and the earthly realm was seen as a bipartite process. Micah's words are thus construed as based on a vision of a reality beyond the directly visible.

with regard to Samaria and Jerusalem. The mention of the capital cities of both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms indicates that the compiler construed the prophecies of Micah as directed toward Israel and Judah. The word order parallels the historical order: Samaria was conquered first (Wolff 1982, 6). This can be interpreted as a sign that the compiler recognized prophecies directed toward Samaria next to texts related to Jerusalem. It can also be a hermeneutical clue, however: the intended readership were all the tribes of Israel. There is no need to see this second relative clause as a later addition (contra Sellin 1922, 262; Robinson and Horst 1964, 130; Willi-Plein 1971, 70; Renaud 1977, 1–8; Ben Zvi 2000, 13–23).

Comments

Later tradition recognized the deeds and doings of Micah the Morashtite as grounded in an encounter with the divine (see for instance Jenson 2008, 102–3); therefore, his words are not to be seen as the utterances of an enraged and angry individual who furiously attacked the changes in society, religion, and politics of his time. He is presented as a person who honestly applies the Yahwistic moral and religious tradition to the transformations of his time (for a view of the prophetic word as solely based on revelation, see Waltke 2007, 43; Dempster 2017, 57–63; Gignilliat 2019, 71–82). On the other side of the hermeneutical spectrum stands the view that the book of Micah is the product of an anonymous male scribe from the Persian era (Ben Zvi 2000, 13–23; O'Brien 2015, 5). A middle position is found in Kessler (1999, 76–77), who assumes that the later superscription had a theological function: to express the claim that both in words of doom and in oracles of hope the voice of the same God can be heard (see also McKane 1998, 21–23).

PART I
A DISTORTING PROPHECY (1:2–16)

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Micah 1:2–16 is to be read as a literary unit (van der Woude 1976, 19–22; Ben Zvi 2000, 23–41; Cruz 2016, 77–79). The sections cohere on a conceptual level. The chapter starts with a prophecy announcing a universal divine judgment (1:2–4). Surprisingly, this prelude does not lead to a series of prophecies against the nations as is the case with texts from other major and minor prophets in the Hebrew Bible (see Isa 13–24, Jer 46–51, Ezek 25–27, Amos 1–2, Obad, Nah 2–3, Zeph 2). After proclaiming the downfall of Samaria and Jerusalem, the author presents a motivation for the impending doom. The transgressions of both Israel and Judah have offended YHWH, who will now act against his chosen people (1:5–7). As an intermezzo, the "I" character expresses his sadness. The fate of his compatriots disturbs him (1:8–9). Then, in a final move, the native homeland of Micah is reproached. The area around Moreshet cannot escape divine vengeance (1:10–16). The text thus presents a hermeneutic of surprise and encirclement. The audience would have no problem in labeling the other nations as transgressors. The inhabitants of the Southern Kingdom would certainly accept the sins of Samaria. The population in the Shephelah would not be surprised by a verdict regarding the deeds and doings of the wicked capital. But in the end, they are also targeted (see van der Woude 1976, 19–22).

There are no convincing arguments for construing the first part of the chapter as a later addition (Nogalski 1993a, 137–41, separates 1:1–9; Schart 1998, 177–81, separates only 1:2–7; Kessler 2020, 179–80). According to that view, the first part would have functioned as a redactional bridge with Jonah 2, connecting the traditions about Micah to a larger corpus of materials. Yet when the first seven or nine verses are excluded, we are left with an incoherent composition.

The questions of date and authorship of this unit are difficult to answer. Van der Woude's (1976, 19–22) view that the chapter was composed by Micah just before the downfall of Samaria is daring but speculative. In my view, the contents of the chapter fit the final decades of the eighth century BCE in general. They make sense against that historical horizon full of threat and uncertainties regarding the future. Whether or not Micah himself was the author cannot be decided.

YHWH's Epiphany (1:2–4)

1

[2]Listen, all these nations!
Notice, O earth and its fullness!
The Lord God will be a witness among you
from his holy temple.
[3]For, look, YHWH is coming out of his dwelling;
he descends and treads upon the high places of the earth.
[4]The mountains are melting underneath him
and the valleys are ripped open
like wax before the fire,
like water cascading down from a slope.

Introduction

Micah 1:2–4 opens with a summons to listen followed by the description of a theophany. Although Israel and Judah are the focus and the addressees of the prophecy, the whole earth is summoned to listen and take notice. In verse 2b a shift in the antecedent occurs. The suffix 2.m.p. "You," in *bākem,* does not refer to the nations and the world in its entirety, but to Israel and Judah. The nations are merely invited to take note of God's quarrel with Samaria and Jerusalem.

Earlier scholars attempted to read 1:2–7 as a lawsuit that would also function as a bridge with Micah 6. Ben Zvi (2000, 28) has correctly challenged this view by arguing that a theophany would not fit in the framework of a lawsuit (see also Cruz 2016, 86–90).

A theophany is a general ancient Near Eastern literary form (Jeremias 1965; Hillers 1984, 20; Scriba 1995; Savran 2003; DeLapp 2018). Elements in this pattern are (1) the coming of the deity from a heavenly abode to earth, and (2) the effects of this coming on the world of nature, characterized by features that go beyond the ordinary. Knowing that theophanies have a general ancient Near Eastern character makes it difficult to

construe Mic 1:2–4 as being solely connected with Northern Israel (contra De Moor 2020, 58). Quite often, this coming of the deity is followed by words of judgment. In Micah 1, this judgment is elaborated in the following sections.

Notes

1:2. *Listen, all these nations!* The Hebrew is wooden but not ungrammatical here (De Moor 2020, 60). The noun *kol,* "all," has a 3.m.p. suffix followed by two vocatives that function as the referent of the suffix, hence a rendering "all you people" is less likely, although they are addressed with the imperative (contra Robinson and Horst 1964, 130; Hillers 1984, 32; R. L. Smith 1984, 15; Shaw 1993, 32; Kessler 1999, 80–81). The LXX renders *kullām* with *logous,* construing the word as the object of the imperative, causing Ryssel (1887, 12–13) to suggest a very unlikely **mlm,* "words," as the original form.

Notice, O earth and its fullness! Wood (2000, 651–52) translates the verb *qāšab,* Hi., "to pay attention," with "look" and construes this visual imperative as an argument for her view that the original layer in Micah was the report of a prophetic drama (see also Smith-Christopher 2015, 48).

The Lord God will be a witness among you. The name of God is doubled, and its unusual vocalization, *yĕhwih,* suggests a pronunciation as *'ĕlōhîm,* implying the reading "the Lord God." There is no need to remove one of the two elements (with De Moor 2020, 61; contra Robinson and Horst 1964, 130; Willi-Plein 1971, 70).

The construction of the phrase "witness (*'ēd*) among you" makes clear that YHWH is cast in the role of a "testifying witness" (on the distinction between "observing" and "testifying" witnesses, see Tucker 1966; Schenker 1990). The preposition *be* can have the meaning "against" (thus van der Woude 1976, 27; Stansell 1988, 9; Shaw 1993, 32; Kessler 1999, 80; De Moor 2020, 49, who hints at texts like Josh 24:22 and 1 Sam 12:5), but a rendition "among, in the midst of" fits better in the context (with the LXX; Weiser 1949, 204; Rudolph 1975, 32; McKane 1998, 27–29; Cruz 2016, 79–86).

from his holy temple. The noun *qodšô,* "his holiness," has the function of a *genitivus qualitatis* and can be rendered with an adjective.

1:3. *For, look, YHWH is coming out of his dwelling*. The use of *māqôm* for the divine abode is rather unspecific. From the context and from the literary pattern applied, the reader has to conclude that this abode was "above" (De Moor 2020, 62). The noun—generally "space, location, site"—can indicate any dwelling place. A human "home" is referred to at Judg 7:7. This word, used of the divine abode, is also attested at Pss 26:8, 132:5; Isa 26:21; and Hos 5:15.

he descends and treads upon the high places of the earth. Many scholars delete one of the two verbs, since in their opinion the meter of the clause is disrupted otherwise (Weiser 1949, 204; Jeremias 1965, 22). In more recent scholarship, recourse to *metri causa* is no longer appreciated as a convincing argument (Shaw 1993, 32; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 152). Both verbs are present in the ancient versions. Crenshaw (1972) incorrectly noted that the verb *dārak* is absent from the LXX. It is only in some Lucianic manuscripts that *drk* is not rendered in Greek (Hillers 1984, 17; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 162; Waltke 2007, 48). The Greek scroll Mur 88 has both verbs. In the pesher from Qumran the verb *drk* is absent, but this is due to the fragmentary state of the text and therefore cannot be used as a text-critical argument. So one of the verbs

does not have to be deleted (Willi-Plein 1971, 70; Stansell 1988, 10; De Moor 2020, 62–63).

The collocation *drk ʿal,* "to tread upon," is a traditional element in the description of a theophany (Hab 3:15, Job 9:8; see also Amos 4:13). An intriguing parallel is present in the blessing of Moses. In Deut 33:29, victory is promised to Israel: "you shall tread on their high places"—"their" referring to Israel's enemies. Hence, the verb has the aspect of establishing the ownership of the earth (Dempster 2017, 70) as well as the element of crushing inimical forces.

There are two minor text-critical problems in the expression "the high places of the earth." The Kᵉtîb *bāmôtê* and the Qᵉrê *bāmotê* are two alternative spellings for the feminine plural construction of the noun *bāmāh,* "height," without any difference of meaning. 1QpMic 1.3 reads the article before *ʾèrèṣ,* "earth," which can be seen as a grammatical hypercorrection without text-critical value (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 163–64).

The expression refers to a landscape dotted with strings of hills that can be compared with the back of an animal. Next to the geophysical aspect, the *bāmāh* contains an intertextual reference to the *bāmôt,* the sanctuaries throughout the country that were deprecated by the prophets as well as by the Deuteronomistic authors and redactors for their "deviant, unorthodox" form of Yahwism (see Notes at 1:5). The noun prepares the reader for the forthcoming criticism (Gignilliat 2019, 86–87).

1:4. *The mountains are melting underneath him*. The combination of both nouns suggests a merism (Krašovec 1977). The mention of both vertical ends suggests that the whole earth is in view. The expression has been seen as a reflection of the assumed Ugaritic deity **ġrm wʿmqt,* "mountains and valleys" (Craigie 1971). The line in the Ugaritic pantheon list, however, should be read ^{d}ḪUR.SAG.MEŠ ù A-*mu-ú*, "mountains and waters" (Parker and Xella 1999).

The verb *māsas,* Ni., with mountains as subject occurs a few times in descriptions of a theophany (Isa 34:3, Mic 1:4, Ps 97:5). The theophany inscription from Kuntillet ʿAjrud reads as follows:

> And when El (or God) shone forth on r[
> and mountains melted (*wymsn*)
> and peaks were crushed (*wydkn*)
> . . .
> to bless Baal on the day of batt[le]
> to the name of El (or God) on the day of batt[le]
> (3:1; ca. 800 BCE; *CoS* 2, 47D; see De Moor 2015, 201; 2020, 58, 64)

In the description of a theophany in Judg 5:5, a parallel verb, *nāzal,* "the mountains will quake," is used. In Ps 46:6 the image of the earth melting before God is used (see also Ps 97:5). The theme is present in Mesopotamian descriptions of divine intervention (Jeremias 1965, 89).

and the valleys are ripped open. The author uses a form of the verb *bāqaʿ,* Hitp., "to be split open." The clause is to be read as a *passivum divinum:* although the "valleys" are grammatically the subject of the verb, YHWH is the implied subject of the act. Although the clause seems to be a typical topos in the theophany, it is only here that "valleys" are the subject of the verb.

like wax before the fire. The double comparison—the melting of the mountains "like wax before the fire"; the valleys to be ripped open like cascading and destroying water running off the hillside—is very illustrative and underscores the power of the appearance of YHWH on the stage of history.

like water cascading down from a slope. The form *muggārîm* should be construed as a Hoph. participle with iterative force, indicating the continuous runoff of the waters.

Comments

The book of Micah opens with a description of a theophany. Here, traditional elements are presented in a new way in order to connect with the following prophecy of doom. The stress regarding the universal power of YHWH serves as a prelude to the gravity of the impending ordeal (Robinson and Horst 1964, 130–31). The imagery is derived from overwhelming and disquieting geological events, such as volcanic activity and earthquakes (De Moor 2020, 63–65), which in the ancient Near Eastern mindscape were interpreted as indicators of divine activity.

In this opening section, it is not clear against whom God's coming is directed and who will suffer from the impending doom and destruction. The author of Micah 1 slowly unpacks the message. The rhetorical effect of this process contains an element of surprise.

For the Transgressions of Israel and Judah (1:5–7)

1

[5]All this will happen because of the transgression of Jacob
and because of the sins of the house of Israel.
What is the transgression of Jacob other than Samaria?
What are the high places of Judah but Jerusalem?
[6]I will make Samaria into a heap of stones in the field,
a place for a vineyard.
I will hurl down her stones to the valley
and I will expose her foundations.
[7]All her graven images will be crushed.
All her <wooden poles> will be burned with fire.
I will assign all her idols to devastation
for they were gathered from the wages of a prostitute.
To the wages of a prostitute they shall return.

Introduction

Micah 1:5–7 contains a motivated prophecy of doom and as such formulates the aim of the divine theophany. The reason for God's judgment is seen in Israel trespassing the moral code of the covenant with illicit cultic rites the character of which is hinted at but not specified. The impending doom is summarized in the image of reversal. The city of Samaria will be turned into an agricultural area. The symbols of "adultery" will be smashed and their power broken.

Verse 7 is sometimes seen as a later addition (Sellin 1922, 265; Robinson and Horst 1964, 131; Weingart 2019, 467). According to Fritz (1974) verses 6–7 were added after the exile as an imitation of the original 3:12. Werse (2019, 184–97, 217–20) assumes that 1:5b–7, 9 were added by the "Four Redaction I." Since there are no indications in the text for a redactional layer here, the bridge with 3:12 can be seen as an example of

rhetorical repetition, and the unit is otherwise a coherent whole. I see no grounds for assuming redactional activities in 1:5–7 (also De Moor 2020, 71–73).

Notes

1:5. *All this will happen because of the transgression of Jacob*. The preposition *be* is causal in function here (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §11.2.5f; Gen 18:28). The transgressions of both Judah and Israel caused YHWH to come as judge.

Biblical Hebrew deploys a set of nouns that all classify human conduct as deeds or words that jeopardize the relationship between God and his people (Knierim 1967; Jenson 2008, 108; Boda 2009; Lam 2016). Although the various nouns express one central idea, they each have their specific nuances. *Pèša',* "transgression," indicates those deeds by which a human or a group of humans has crossed the borderline between "good" and "bad" behavior as stipulated in the moral code of ancient Israel.

and because of the sins of the house of Israel. The Hebrew noun *ḥaṭṭā't,* "sin," refers to the aspect of "missing one's mark." Phrased differently, the house of Israel did not live up to the expectations set.

What is the transgression of Jacob other than Samaria? The personal pronoun *mî,* "who," indicates that both Samaria and Jerusalem are seen as personified (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 172–73; Jacobs 2001, 233–34; Cruz 2016, 76; Dempster 2017, 70–71; De Moor 2020, 66). 1QpMic reads *mh,* "what," instead of *mî,* which is an overcorrection *ad sensum*. Since this clause fits in the present context, there are no convincing arguments to construe verse 5b as a later addition (contra Rudolph 1975, 53).

In verse 5a "Jacob" stands in parallelism with "house of Israel." Biblical tradition identifies Jacob and Israel as the same (Gen 32:28). Verse 5b, however, presents a different parallelism. Jacob is correctly identified with the capital city of Samaria but is set in parallelism with "Judah" and "Jerusalem" in verse 1:5b. This makes sense as it indicates the two kingdoms of ancient Israel, but the parallelism between verses 5a and 5b seems to be in disorder. This feature has been interpreted differently. Some scholars assume a text-critical error and suggest that in verse 5a, "house of Israel" is a misreading of *"house of Judah" (Wellhausen 1963, 135; Sebök 1887, 46; *BHS*). The reading *"house of Judah," however, is supported only by the Peshitta. The seemingly disordered parallelism can also be read, however, as part of a literary strategy. On the basis of the parallelism in verse 5a, the (Judaean) reader would expect a prophecy of doom against the Northern Kingdom. The author cuts across the prediction pattern: Judah too had crossed the line (see Shaw 1993, 32–33).

What are the high places of Judah but Jerusalem? The noun *bāmôt,* "high places," is used here in the plural. The LXX translates the word *ad sensum* with *hamartia,* "sin." Since the meaning of the MT is clear, there is no need to change the text. The Hebrew word *bāmāh* can be used of an elevated spot in the landscape, a hill or a mountain, as well as an illegitimate sanctuary (Vaughan 1974). The second meaning is meant here. The text might refer to the Iron Age temple excavated in Tel Motza, near Jerusalem, where the divine was venerated in the forms of a horse and a ram (Kisilevitz 2015; De Moor 2020, 68). It is uncertain whether the two rather tiny human heads (clay baked) should be seen as representations of the divine (see Vanderhooft and Lipschits 2020).

1:6. *I will make Samaria into a heap of stones in the field*. Here, the author presents the words as coming from God (Kessler 1999, 87; Runions 2001, 124; Bail 2004, 91–92). The imagery indicates that there will be no future whatsoever for Samaria (Kessler 2020, 177).

The noun *ʿî,* "heap of stones," is also attested in Mic 3:12; this same theme is present as well at Jer 26:18, where defenders of Jeremiah "quote" Micah, and further in Ps 79:1, where the psalmist laments that the nations have defiled God's temple and turned Jerusalem into "heaps of stones." The imagery has two sides. On the one hand, farmers in Iron Age Israel used to heap up stones that they collected when clearing their lands for agriculture (De Moor 2020, 68–69). On the other hand, turning a city into a ruin resting in a desolate field is a standard topos in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions describing the fate of a city that had rebelled and was conquered by the king (for instance, in the inscriptions of Shalmaneser III, Tiglath-Pileser III, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal). I offer two examples.

After conquering the cities of the Ullubaeans, Tiglath-Pileser III erected a stele with his royal image and military deeds on it. Anyone who erased the image or smashed the monument would receive fierce punishments, among which was to "turn his land into mounds of ruins" (Mila Mergi rock inscription: 51; see Tadmor 1994, 116; with a parallel in Tiglath-Pileser III's stele from Iran III: 5′; *CoS* 2, 117B; see Tadmor 1994, 110). After his conquest of Karkemish, Sargon II wrote:

> 20′ [. . . *I caused*] the water of the irrigation ditches (and) the murmur of the *current* [*to stop*,] (saying) "let him (= Pisiri) not irrigate its (= Karkemish) arable land."
> 21′ [. . . The luxuriant meadows] of the irrigation [*district*] were let go fallow like pastureland, they became a desert. (Marchesi 2019)

In a report of Sargon II's campaign against Marduk-apla-iddina, the king of Babylon known in the Hebrew Bible as Merodakh-baladan, it is written that "fifteen strongholds [in the area of Dur-Yakin], with the towns in their neighborhood I turned into mounds (of ruin), the people, small and great, who dwelt in (these) districts, and the gods in whom they trusted I jointly carried off and left not one to escape" (Sargon II Nimrud Prism VI: 58–62; Gadd 1954).

This topos has ancient roots. In an Old Babylonian omen text the following can be found: "It (Dur-Yakin) will be turned into tells and ruins and will be devastated" (Yale Oriental Series X 17.12; see Goetze 1947, plates xv–xix). Echoes of this theme are present in the curses for breaking the covenant relationship, for instance in Lev 26:31: "I will lay (verb *nātan*) your cities in ruin." The author of Micah appropriated an ancient Near Eastern war motif for his message.

Probably unaware of the victorious military background of the curse, the Old Greek translator rendered *ʿî,* "heap of stones," with the somewhat uncommon noun *opôrofulakion,* "hut for a garden watcher," here and in 3:12. There is no clear answer to the question of why the LXX chose this word. The most popular proposal is to assume that the translator was avoiding too strong a word (McKane 1998, 32–33; Theocharous 2012, 94–106; Glenny 2015, 45–47). Another possibility might be that the LXX did not understand the Hebrew noun and "invented" a word that has a connection with *kèrèm,* "vineyard," in the next line. Note that later Greek versions corrected the LXX

(Aquila: *eis sôrous,* "into heaps"; Symmachus and Theodotion: *eis bounous,* "into hills"; Theocharous 2012, 95).

a place for a vineyard. Growing grapes was an important agricultural activity in Iron Age Israel and Judah. The image evoked is that of the shift from city life to agriculture, as if there had never been a town built on the hill of Samaria (De Moor 2020, 69).

I will hurl down her stones to the valley / and I will expose her foundations. As in Ezra 3:12, the noun *yĕsôd,* "foundation," refers to the basic architectural element on which a structure is built and on which a building's stability relies. The laying bare of the foundations is an act of undoing the construction (De Moor 2020, 70–71). In the fifth-century BCE Phoenician inscription of King Yehawmilk, the person who will *tgl mstrw,* "uncover the foundation," on which the stele is placed, will certainly be punished by the Lady of Byblos (*KAI* 10:14–16 = *CoS* 2, 32). Here, too, the punishment is a divine reaction to a trespasser.

1:7. *All her graven images will be crushed*. The noun *pāsîl* refers to an idol made of stone, wood, or clay. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the word and its cognate *pèsèl* are used to designate images of deities other than YHWH. The passive Hoph. voice indicates that the act is seen as a *passivum divinum*. Whatever enemy will crush the divine images, it is YHWH who acts behind the scenes.

All her <wooden poles> will be burned with fire. The noun *'ètnān,* "gift, wage" or "whore's fee" (Hillers 1984, 16; Ben Zvi 2000, 32; Jacobs 2001, 234), does not make sense in verse 7a. The reader expects a noun that stands one way or another parallel to the "graven images" and the "idols" of verse 7a. Next to that the noun is the object of the verb *śārap,* "to burn," which as such stands parallel to verbs for demolition. This would indicate that a wooden object is meant here. Scholars have tried to solve this problem along two lines. Some see a connection with the Ugaritic noun *itnn,* "marriage gift" (Kottsieper 1984, 108; Korpel and De Moor 2014, 46; De Moor 2020, 73–75), but this suggestion does not solve the problem. Watson (1984) proposed to construe the noun as a parallel of Ugaritic *tnn,* "snake," with a prosthetic *'aleph*. This suggestion, however, does not make sense. Von Soden (1988) assumes that the Ugaritic noun is derived from Hurrian *ụatnannu*. Problematic in this view is the fact that the Hurrian noun has a meaning connected to the world of horses—either a "stable," a "carriage," or "horse breeding" (Richter 2012, 307). Many scholars follow the surmise of Wellhausen (1963, 135), who supposed that the original reading *'šryh,* "her wooden poles, Asherahs," had been replaced by *'tnnyh* during the process of redaction (see also Powis Smith 1911, 35; Robinson and Horst 1964, 130; Willi-Plein 1971, 71; Vuilleumer 1971, 17; McKane 1998, 33–34). Some exegetes take the present text as original, especially since Wellhausen's proposal has no grounding in the ancient versions (Renaud 1977, 15; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 178–81; Waltke 2007, 54). Despite the lack of support from the *versiones antiquae,* Wellhausen's proposal is the most attractive: it makes sense of the clause—wooden poles can be burned—and the change to *'tnnyh* can easily be explained from the fact that the noun *'ètnān,* "gift, wage," occurs two times later in the verse.

The passive Ni. voice of the verb *śārap,* "to burn," indicates that the act is seen as a *passivum divinum*. No matter which enemy will burn the divine images, it is YHWH who acts behind the scenes.

I will assign all her idols to devastation. The noun *'āṣāb* occurs nineteen times in the Hebrew Bible and denotes an image made of stone, wood, or clay generally referring to

a deity other than YHWH. The noun could also be used, however, for an image made for YHWH. The noun *šĕmāmāh,* "desolation," indicates a reversal of fates. The once splendid images will be turned into objects of waste.

for they were gathered from the wages of a prostitute. The noun *'ètnān,* "gift, wage," makes sense in verse 7b. The cultic items that are threatened with destruction there are here disparagingly classified as "wages of a prostitute," which means that they are construed as having been paid for by the benefits of prostitution (Kessler 1999, 88; Ben Zvi 2000, 32).

The noun *zônāh,* "prostitute," is used here figuratively. At the background stands the metaphor idolatry = prostitution (Runions 2001, 124–25; Cruz 2016, 95–103). In venerating deities other than YHWH, or construing YHWH as a deity comparable to other deities, the Israelites and the Judaeans betrayed the confidence of YHWH as a man betrays the relationship with his wife when committing adultery. This implies that there is no reason at all to presume a form of cultic prostitution in or around the precincts of Jerusalem and Samaria (van der Toorn 1989; Frevel 1995, 726–33).

To the wages of a prostitute they shall return. With the verb *šûb,* "to turn," the theme of reversal is indicated: the shift from money into idol will be undone. The LXX renders *yāšûbû* with *sunéstrepsen,* "they gathered," paralleling the verb from the previous line and, in doing so, neutralizing the theme of reversal.

Comments

Micah 1:5–7 articulates the fear present in Israel and Judah as a reaction to the Neo-Assyrian threat (Smith-Christopher 2015, 48–61). The verses offer a theological interpretation of the uncertain reality by understanding it in the context of the relationship between YHWH and Israel. By their illicit cults, both Samaria and Jerusalem have transgressed the moral code and can expect annihilation: their capital cities will be devastated, and their iconic cultic symbols will be smashed (De Moor 2020, 52). The theme of exile is absent in this oracle of doom, as is the notion of a foreign power executing the devastation. It is YHWH alone who acts (see Cruz 2016, 95).

Who Is Lamenting? (1:8–9)

1

[8]Because of this, I will mourn,
    and howl,
and go barefoot
    and naked.
I will make a wailing like the jackals
    and mourning like the daughters of an ostrich.
[9]For her wounds are incurable,
    since it has come to Judah
and has touched the gate of my people,
    <even to> Jerusalem.

Introduction

Micah 1:8–9 consists of two parts. After a description of the mourning of the "I" character, there follows the motivation for his lamenting. Using forms of the *perfectum propheticum,* he depicts the forthcoming fate of Judah and Jerusalem with the image of an incurable wound. The small section functions as a hinge between 1:2–7 and 1:10–16 (Hillers 1984, 22–23; Na'aman 1995b, 516–17; Kessler 1999, 91–92; Cook 2004, 196). Hence there is no need to see the lines as part of the D-redaction (Schart 1998, 181–83), as a later *Fortschreibung* (contra Jeremias 2007, 129–30), or as part of Four Redaction I (Werse 2019, 184–97, 217–20).

Notes

1:8. *Because of this, I will mourn*. The expression *'al-zō't,* "therefore," refers back to the doom announced in the preceding section and points ahead to the evaluation of that doom in verse 9 (see Waltke 2007, 64; Smith-Christopher 2015, 61–62).

From a literary point of view, the "I" character is a player on the stage of the text who should not hastily be identified with the historical figure of Micah. Elsewhere in the book of Micah, the "I" can be seen as referring to YHWH. This opens up the possibility of construing the "I" as referring to YHWH (for instance Runions 2001, 125). In Mic 7:8–9, a prophetic "I" longs for the future. There, the "I" is inclusive, since it refers to those in Judah and Jerusalem who were punished by the divine wrath. In 1:8, "I" refers to a prophetic figure who is upset about the impending fate of his people. From a theological perspective, it should be noted that this prophetic "I" is presented not as an unmoved messenger, but as a person suffering the fate he announces (Cruz 2016, 103–7; E. F. Davis 2014, 12–14; however, Smith-Christopher 2015, 63, construes this act of mourning as a virtue of God). According to Wolff (1982, 7), this attitude of empathy was part of the tradition of being an elder in Moreshet.

The Old Greek translated all of the 1.c.s. verbal forms in this verse as 3.f.s. verbal forms, taking Judah/Israel as the subject of the acts of mourning. In doing so, the translators produced a smooth continuation from 1:7 to 1:8 but placed the prophet in a different role (Glenny 2015, 49); therefore, this reading should not be adopted (Waltke 2007, 65). Targum Jonathan has rendered the verbs with 3.m.p. forms, implying that it was the inhabitants of Samaria and Jerusalem who mourned. The Vulgate and Peshitta did not adopt this change; neither did the Greek scroll Mur 88.

Andersen and Freedman (2000, 190–91) argue for the possibility that the "I" refers to YHWH. They state that the "I" in the preceding verse also referred to the God of Israel. Next to that, they correctly argue that the image of God in the Hebrew Bible is not painted with the colors of the impossibility of divine suffering. Third, they argue that the expression "my people" (1:9) can only be construed as meaning "God's people." Their arguments, however, are not convincing—especially the final one. In various instances in the Hebrew Bible, human beings see Israel as "my people" (Ruth 1:16, 3:11). It therefore might be better to construe the mourning "I" as referring to the prophet (Hillers 1984, 23).

The verb *sāpad,* "to mourn," could refer to the act of "beating the breast" (as in Isa 32:12) and which in Mic 1:8 serves as an indicator of a rite in anticipation of disaster (Hillers 1984, 23; Cook 2004, 196; Olyan 2004, 20; Dempster 2017, 72; De Moor 2020, 77). This verb form, as well as the other ones in verse 8, is cohortative. This grammatical form of the Hebrew language expresses the strong will or desire of the subject to act in a specific way (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §34.5; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 190).

and howl. The verb *yālal,* "to wail, howl," occurs several times in descriptions of mourning (e.g., Jer 48:20, Joel 1; Bail 2004, 86–90; Olyan 2004, 130–31; Smith-Christopher 2015, 62). The verb perhaps can be seen as an imitation of the sound of wounded animals.

and go barefoot. This expression refers to an act of humiliation, probably as a self-imposed punishment. In Isa 20:2–4 this image is metaphorically transposed to a depiction of an impending exile (Robinson and Horst 1964, 131; Kessler 1999, 93).

and naked. Nudity can be seen in a parallel way. In giving away the shelter of clothes, the mourner is set in a very vulnerable position (Kessler 1999, 93; Bail 2004, 86–90; Olyan 2004, 30–31; Korpel and De Moor 2014, 250). The behavior is certainly not "bizarre." The parallel in Isa 20:2 does not hint at a redactional thread (contra Zapff

2017, 539) but is, like Mic 1:8, the description of a mourning rite. One text from ancient Mari suggests that a prophet could go around naked when bringing a message of doom (ARM 26, 206:23–27; see Nissinen 2017, 39–41; De Moor 2020, 77).

I will make a wailing like the jackals. The Hebrew noun *tan* refers to a jackal. In the Hebrew Bible, this animal is seen as living on the fringes of settled, cultivated land. From the steppe these animals could produce a heart-breaking sound that easily can be interpreted as the sound of mourning (see Isa 13:22, 34:13, 35:7, 43:20; Jer 9:10, 10:22, 49:33, 51:37; Lam 4:3; Mal 1:3; Job 30:29).

The LXX translates *tan* with *drákôon,* "dragon," introducing a mythological dimension to the text that was adopted by the Vulgate (Glenny 2015, 50). The reading of the LXX is probably a misreading: *tannîn,* "serpent, dragon, sea monster," instead of *tannîm,* "jackals" (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 190).

and mourning like the daughters of an ostrich. The noun *'ēbel,* "mourning," is a derivative of the verb *'ābal* that generically describes all acts of mourning (Olyan 2004, 20; Waltke 2007, 66–67; De Moor 2020, 78).

Like the jackal, the *ya'ănāh,* "ostrich," is also an animal living on the fringes. The bird is often mentioned in texts that describe a desolate situation, especially after the destruction of a city (Isa 13:21, 34:13; Jer 50:39; Lam 4:3; King 1988, 132; De Moor 2020, 78–79). It is remarkable that in these texts the ostrich is mentioned in parallel with the jackal. In his final defense against the allegations of his "friends," Job complains about his fate: "I have become a brother of jackals, a companion of ostriches" (Job 30:29). The LXX translates *ya'ānāh* with *Seirèn,* "Siren," introducing a mythological dimension to the text that was adopted by the Vulgate (Glenny 2015, 50–51).

1:9. *her wounds are incurable*. The impending fate of Judah is painted in the language of the incurable wound. Such an infliction by a deity, or instrumentally by human beings, is a literary topos widely used in the ancient Near East. The motif has been construed as part of treaty/covenant language (e.g., Hillers 1964, 64–66). This claim can be substantiated by referring to its presence in texts that are clearly treaty/covenant related, such as in the Gula curse in the loyalty oaths regulating the succession of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon: "May Gula, the great physician, put sickness and [weariness in your hearts] and an unhealing wound in your body" (SAA 2.6 52; *CoS* 4.36).

In the Hebrew Bible, the "incurable wound" is presented as the final outcome for those breaking the stipulations of the covenantal code (Deut 28:27, 35; Nah 3:19). The motif, however, is also attested in texts that are not related to the theme of treaty/covenant (e.g., Codex Hammurabi Rev. 28:50–65 = *CoS* 2.131; Esarhaddon Zindjirli stele; Bilingual Inscription from Tell Fekherye = *CoS* 2.34; Jer 8:22, 15:18). In other words, the motif should be construed as the expression of divine force majeure that is exercised to restore the balance in the social and moral order by punishing a player who transgressed the borderline of good conduct.

The suggestion that this incurable wound/blow refers to the attack of Shalmaneser V against Samaria (De Moor 2020, 80) would give a firm date for Micah 1 but does not account for the imaginary language at hand.

The proposal by Sellin (1922, 266; adopted by Elliger 1934, 85–89; Weiser 1949, 210; Rudolph 1975, 34; Mays 1976, 48) to read *makkat yh,* "punch by Yāh," although *ad sensum,* has no support in the ancient versions; besides, it negates the concealing language of the author (Utzschneider 1999, 76; Smith-Christopher 2015, 66).

since it has come to Judah / and has touched the gate of my people. The noun *ša'ar,* "gate," normally refers to an architectural element in the defensive wall of a city. The noun could also be used, however, to indicate the entrance to a wider area, for example, the "gate of Benjamin" (Jer 20:8) or the "gates of the land" (Jer 15:7). The "gate of my people" points ahead to the area of the Shephelah in Mic 1:10–16 that is construed comparatively as the defensive door to Jerusalem.

<even to> Jerusalem. The adverbial adjunct *'ad yĕrûšālaim* is added asyndetically. Since Jerusalem cannot be its own gate, the words "even to" should be added in translation.

Comments

Deity, prophet, and people form a rhetorical triangle. The prophet acts as an intermediary between the two other poles. In Micah 1, the prophetic "I" character is not situated completely outside and opposite the people. Being part of the people accused, he suffers the same fate and laments the future of his people (see also Jenson 2008, 104; Gignilliat 2019, 93–96). He feels the need (cohortative) to enact mourning rites as an expression of his solidarity with the fate of his people. With the symbolic mourning rites and using the language of the incurability of the impending wound, he stresses the graveness of events to come as well as the irreversibility of the people's fortunes.

When things go wrong with someone else, many people have the inclination to turn away from the grief of the other, as if not seeing would annul the pain of the fellow creature. The "I" character abides with his people and indirectly summons the reader to look at the face of the other.

Wailing Wordplays on the Shephelah (1:10–16)

1

[10]Do not proclaim in Gath!
    Certainly, do not cry!
In Beth-le-Aphrah
    roll yourself in dust.
[11]Go on your way, inhabitant of Shaphir,
    shameful nakedness!
Do not go out, inhabitant of Zaanan.
The lamentation of Beth-ha-Ezel:
    "He will take from you his support."
[12]For the inhabitant of Maroth
    trembles incredibly
since evil from YHWH
    will descend to the gate of Jerusalem.
[13]Connect the chariot to the team of horses,
    inhabitant of Lachish!
She is the beginning of the sin
    for daughter Zion,
because in you were found
    the transgressions of Israel.
[14]Therefore, give a parting gift
    to Moreshet-Gath.
The houses of Achzib
    will be a deception to the kings of Israel.
[15]Once more, I will bring a conqueror to you,
    inhabitant of Maresha.
He will come to Adullam,
    the glory of Israel.

[16]Shear and shave
because of the children of your delight.
Enlarge your baldness like that of an eagle
because they will go away from you into exile.

Introduction

Micah 1:10–16 forms a lament or dirge (King 1988, 58–60) using puns on the names of cities in the Shephelah region. In the Hebrew Bible, *šĕpēlāh,* lit. "lowland," refers to a ridge of low hills that forms the natural border between the area of Judah and Jerusalem and the coastal plain. The ridge stretches more than 60 kilometers from Beersheba in the south to Lachish in the north. From a military point of view, the area was of great importance, since it formed the gateway from the coast to Jerusalem. The Assyrian king Sennacherib, for instance, campaigned through the Shephelah toward Jerusalem in 701 BCE. The wordplays on the names of cities in the area are loaded with the language of mourning. The image invoked is that of devastation reaching the gates of Jerusalem.

The unit is composed in several parts. The first three verses (vv. 10–12) contain puns on place names combined with elements of lament. The same holds for verses 14–15 (for a nice outline, including an attempt at a dynamic English rendition, see Dempster 2017, 66). The verse in the center on Lachish (v. 13) can be seen as a hermeneutical clue. Here the theme of mourning is absent, and the verse refers instead to the sinful behavior of the "inhabitant of Lachish." A reason is given for the impending fate that might also be seen as an argument for the forthcoming destruction of the other localities in the Shephelah. The concluding verse reverts to the theme of mourning. Like 1:13, 1:16 is directed to all places in the region that have been mentioned, summoning them to mourn their coming fate.

A closer look at the unit could reveal a set of inconsistencies. In the minds of various scholars (Elliger 1934; Robinson and Horst 1964, 132–33; Mays 1976, 48–60; Levin 2018, 446), some expressions present awkward Hebrew, and variants in the ancient versions are not easily understood as based on the present Hebrew text. Collin (1971) even goes so far as to assume two different editions of Micah 1 behind the LXX and MT. These differences had already been observed by Jerome (*Commentarium in Michæam Prophetam,* 440–48; see Kessler 1999, 99). These phenomena have led various scholars to the view that the unit in its present Hebrew form contains a distorted text. Several suggestions for the reconstruction of the original text have been made (Weiser 1949, 211–16; Willi-Plein 1971, 72–75; Renaud 1977, 18–34; McKane 1998, 38–58). In my view, these various and diverse proposals are not convincing, since the inconsistencies are only apparent and the Hebrew text can be read intelligibly in its present form, as I argue in the following Notes (see also Hillers 1984, 24–25; Shaw 1993, 34–36; Kessler 1999, 98–111; Bail 2004, 92–98; Gignilliat 2019, 96–100).

Dating this passage is not easy. Various Assyrian attacks have been seen as the background of these words, with a preference for the campaign of Sennacherib in 701 BCE (for instance Hillers 1984, 30; Kessler 1999, 102–3; De Moor 2020, 88–96). Connecting this text with one specific event, however, is hermeneutically dangerous. It would give the impression that the author of Micah 1 functioned as an embedded reporter in the Assyrian Army, while the whole point of this section is to warn the inhabitants

of the Shephelah of an impending disaster. The language of this warning, however, is based on the recent encounter(s) with the grim character of Assyrian warfare.

Schart (1998, 181–83) construes *1:8–16 as a section independent from *1:2–7 and attributes the two glosses (1:12b and 13b) to the D-redaction that connected various parts of the Book of the Twelve.

The arguments defending the view that 1:10–16 was composed on the pattern of ancient Near Eastern city laments are not convincing (contra Wood 2000, 654–56). These mostly Sumerian compositions were part of the grief process *ex eventu,* while Mic 1:10–16 is a predictive text.

Notes

1:10. *Do not proclaim in Gath!* The first clause of Mic 1:10 has an intertextual connection with 2 Sam 1:20, where David laments the death of Saul and Jonathan. According to 2 Sam 1:18, David's lament was part of the Book of Yashar/the Upright, probably an ancient collection of Hebrew poems (see also Josh 10:13; Greenstein 2014). Although the lament of David could have been composed as a later reflection, based on Mic 1:10, it is more likely that Micah quotes and expands upon a traditional ancient Israelite hymn probably from the Book of the Upright (Wellhausen 1963, 136; Kessler 1999, 104–5; Utzschneider 1999, 83; Corzillius 2016, 104–7; De Moor 2020, 97).

The city of *gat,* "Gath," was part of the Philistine pentapolis. The town is to be identified with Tall aṣ-*Ṣāfî* at the transition from the coastal plain to the hills of the Shephelah (King 1988, 59; Waltke 2007, 69; De Moor 2020, 96). Although the city had been part of the Philistine polity, in the eighth century BCE it came under Judaean rule (Maeir 2012; K. Noll 2013, 275; Levin 2018, 450–53; Maeir and Uziel 2020). The suggestion that Gath had been conquered by Sargon II in a campaign in 711 BCE (De Moor 2020, 96–97) is based on an uncertain addition to the so-called Azekah fragment in which the following remark is made: "[the city of Gath (?)] a royal [city] of the Philistines that H[ezek]iah had captured and strengthened for himself [. . ." (Sennacherib Azekah fragment: 11′; *CoS* 2, 119D; see Na'aman 1974).

Some scholars argue that Gath in 1:10 is not identical with Gath in 2 Samuel 1. Budde (1917–1918, 95) proposed the reading of Gilgal; Elliger (1934, 85–89) and Mays (1976, 48) suggested Giloh.

The verb form *taggîdû,* "proclaim," is assonant with the place name Gath. This implies that a reading **taggîlû,* "rejoice," as proposed in *BHS* and based on the LXX *megalunesthe,* "exult," is to be rejected for breaking the pun (Waltke 2007, 69–70; Gignilliat 2019, 98).

Certainly, do not cry! The paranomastic construction with the repetition of the verb *bākāh* stresses the seriousness of the prohibition to weep (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §35.3.1b). "Weeping" is characteristic of mourning rites. Some scholars argue that Gath is the recipient of two summonses: "do not tell" and "do not weep." On this basis, various emendations have been proposed aiming at the reconstruction of a text in which two different cities are addressed. The suggestion by Baruchi-Unna (2008), who constructed an original text that reads "In Gath tell it not. Do not weep in Bethel at all (*'l tbkw bbyt*[*'*]*l*). Ophrah roll yourself in dust," is ingenious but not convincing. A city Bethel, lying north of Jerusalem, is out of place in the context. In addition, the recipient

of the summon "do not tell" is not the city of Gath but the more general addressee of the textual unit (see Suriano 2010, 434–36; De Moor 2020, 97–98).

In Beth-le-Aphrah. This place name, lit. "House of Dust," occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible. On the basis of the book of Micah, the place must have been located in the Shephelah. A clear identification with Tell el-'Areini has been proposed by Suriano (2010).

roll yourself in dust. The noun *'āpār,* "dust," equals the element Aphrah in the city's name. The verb *pālaš,* Hitp., "to roll," occurs a few times in the Hebrew Bible (Jer 6:26, 25:34; Ezek 27:30; Mic 1:10). Here, at Mic 1:10, the reading of the *Qere—hitpallāštî,* imperfect feminine singular—is to be preferred especially since it is supported by the reading in Mur 88 (see Jeremias 2007, 130). Syntactically, the feminine form of the *Qere* fits the context better than does the *Ketîb* (1.c.s. affix conjugation, see Hillers 1984, 25–26; Kessler 1999, 98), and it forms a nice pun on the name of the nearby Philistines. De Moor (2020, 98) even thinks that the original reading must have been "O Philistine." The act of "rolling in the dust" is a symbolic mourning rite comparable to "sitting in dust and ashes" (Olyan 2004, 22; De Moor 2020, 98).

1:11. *Go on your way, inhabitant of Shaphir.* The city name *šāpîr,* "Shaphir," is attested in the Hebrew Bible only here. According to Eusebius (*Onomastikon* 156) the village lay "in the mountain district between Eleutheropolis and Ascalon." The exact location is as yet unknown, although some scholars identify it with Sawâfîr, 13 kilometers to the west of Gath (see Kessler 1999, 104). In view of the fact that the verb *šāpar,* "to be pleasing," is to be seen as a late Aramaism in the Hebrew Bible, De Moor (2020, 99) suggests an Akkadian loanword based on *ša pīri,* "something of an elephant" (see *CAD* P, 419b). The word would be a nickname for an otherwise unknown city.

shameful nakedness! The *nomen rectum bošet,* "shame" should be construed as a *genitivus qualitatis,* hence as an adjective to "nakedness." Walking around in the vulnerability of nakedness clearly is a mourning rite (De Moor 2020, 99).

The wordplay on the name Shaphir is not *prima vista* clear. The name of the city, however, is related to the verb *šāpar,* "to be pleasing" (Ps 16:6, Job 26:6; see Waltke 2007, 74; Gignilliat 2019, 97; contra Kessler 1999, 106). Going around naked hence can be seen as a reversal image of a woman in pleasing clothes.

Do not go out, inhabitant of Zaanan. The town *ṣa'anān,* "Zaanan," does not occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The place might be identical with *ṣĕnān,* "Zenan," which occurs in a list of places in the Shephelah, and this would fit the context of Micah 1 (Josh 15:37; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 209; De Moor 2020, 100).

The verb *yāṣā',* "to go out," has the connotation "to leave the house" in this verse. The verb is assonant with the place name *ṣa'anān.* Staying inside the house can be construed as a mourning rite. When in sorrow, people have the inclination to stay with themselves, disconnected from the world outside, as in the Jewish custom of shiva, where, however, mourners are present (Fishbane 1989; Olyan 2004). They apparently will not be able to live according to the moral standard hidden in their place name.

The lamentation of Beth-ha-Ezel. The town *bêt hā'ēṣèl,* "Beth-ha-Ezel," is not mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Its location is as yet unknown. The element *'ēṣèl* can be seen as referring to the verb *'āṣal,* "to remove," which is a synonym of the verb *lāqaḥ,* "to take," the pun being that the inhabitants of Withdrawn City will be taken away (Gignilliat 2019, 97). On *mispēd,* see Notes at Mic 1:8 on the verb *sāpad*. The

Hebrew construct chain expresses a *genitivus subjectivus:* the "lamentation stemming from Beth-ha-Ezel."

He will take from you his support. The final clause of 1:11 should be construed as a quotation or direct speech. The words contain the lament of the inhabitants of Beth-ha-Ezel. The noun *ʾèmdāh,* "standing place, foundation," has a double meaning. The word refers both to the architectural foundations on which the town was built and to the moral ground on which the inhabitants had built their hope. The loss of both is disastrous and the object of wailing. Na'aman (1995b, 521) compares the noun with Akkadian *imdu,* "tax," which, however, makes no sense. Therefore, it would be better to see a connection with Arabic *ʿumdah,* "support," or Akkadian *imittu* A, "right side," which could metaphorically stand for support (*CAD* I/J, 120–23; De Moor 2020, 100; cf. Ps 121:5).

1:12. *For the inhabitant of Maroth*. The town *mārôt,* "Maroth," is not mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Its location is as yet unknown (see Levin 2018, 446). Micah 1:12 identifies Maroth as the "gate of Jerusalem," which might indicate a location in one of the valleys leading through the Shephelah to Jerusalem. Zeidel (1976, 10) has unconvincingly argued for a connection with the noun *mar,* "bitter." His view has not been adopted (see Levin 2018, 447).

trembles incredibly. The verb form *ḥālāh* is to be construed as a 3.f.s. affix conjugation form of the verb *ḥîl,* "to tremble out of fear," which fits the context better than any of the proposed emendations (van der Woude 1976, 50–51; R. L. Smith 1984, 20, "to hope"; Kessler 1999, 98). Trembling can be part of the initial stage of mourning. On the basis of the LXX *èrxato,* Wellhausen (1963, 136) proposed an original reading *yḥlh,* "she expects," which is widely accepted (e.g., Andersen and Freedman 2000, 226) but does not make sense.

The word *lĕṭôb* has traditionally been construed as "for (the) good" (already in the LXX). It is difficult, however, to understand in the context of Mic 1:12: What "good" would the inhabitant of Maroth tremble for, or, for that matter, expect? Gordis (1934, 186–88) suggested that the expression *lĕṭôb* be construed as an adverb of qualification: "greatly, incredibly," as in Aramaic. His proposal has been both rejected (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 225–26) and adopted (van der Woude 1976, 50–51). In my opinion, it makes sense in the present context, indicating the intensity of the fear of the inhabitant of Maroth. The proposal of Hillers (1984, 26) that *ṭôb* here would have the connotation of "sweet" (see Song 1:2–3; Akkadian *ṭābu* and Ugaritic *ṭb,* "sweet") is not convincing.

since evil from YHWH. The particle *kî* has a causal force in this clause. What follows gives the reason for the trembling fear. The "evil" (*raʿ*) refers to a set of events that will discomfit and upset Maroth. Within the historical context, this evil most probably was an Assyrian attack against Jerusalem. In view of the literary character of Mic 1:10–16, it is impossible to date this campaign exactly. It could be that "the evil" is an assessment of the campaigns of Sennacherib in 715 (as crown prince) or 701 BCE (as king; on these dates, see Becking 2007). On the other hand, an extrapolation by the author of the events surrounding the conquest of Samaria cannot be excluded (on that event, see Becking 2018).

More important than the exact date is the fact that this campaign against Jerusalem through the Shephelah is assessed as based on an act of God. The human acts of the

Assyrian Army are seen as steered by God, who has taken this army into his service. The language of punishment is absent.

will descend to the gate of Jerusalem. This expression indicating the military-defensive role of the Shephelah stands parallel to "the gate of my people" in 1:9.

1:13. *Connect the chariot to the team of horses*. The noun *rèkèš* refers to a range of animals, most probably horses (Waltke 2007, 79). This noun rhymes, loosely, with the place name of Lachish. The summons to exercise the chariot with its horses seems to be ironic, since this preparation will only lead to defeat (De Moor 2020, 102).

inhabitant of Lachish! The biblical city of *lākîš* is to be identified with modern-day Tell ad-duweir (almost universally; see for instance Hillers 1984, 27; Davies 1985; Waltke 2007, 80; De Moor 2020, 102–4; some scholars have a different opinion: Ahlström 1983 identifies Tell ad-duweir with Libna; Mittmann apud Kellermann 1978, 248, suggest Lachish is to be found at Tell 'Etun). It was an important city in Judah and established at a strategic position overlooking the Lachish valley that formed a gateway to Jerusalem. The city is already mentioned in the Amarna correspondence (as Lakiša in EA 287, 288, 328, 329, 335). The importance of the city in monarchic Israel is underscored by the narrative of the conquest of Lachish from the Canaanites by Joshua (Josh 10; 12:11). Second Kings 18:14 mentions Lachish as the place of the encampment of the Assyrian king to which Hezekiah, being confined in Jerusalem like a bird in a cage, sent messengers offering his surrender. The city is not mentioned in the royal inscriptions of Sennacherib (see Frahm 1997; Becking 2007; Ussishkin 2015; Matty 2016). The conquest of Lachish by the Assyrians is depicted on the well-known Lachish reliefs (Ussishkin 1982, 2015; Uehlinger 2003). The scenes on the reliefs give a daunting depiction of the fate that awaits the "inhabitant of Lachish."

She is the beginning of the sin. The expression *rē'šît ḥaṭṭā't,* "the beginning of sin," can be read theologically and topographically at the same time. Topographically, Lachish is the entrance to Jerusalem; everything that comes to that city goes through Lachish, including sins and trespasses. Theologically, Lachish is classified as the "source of sin" (Wellhausen 1963, 136–37; van der Woude 1976, 54; Utzschneider 1999, 88–90). The language in this line is figurative and should not be used for religio-historical conclusions such as that Judah's trespasses all started in Lachish.

for daughter Zion. The expression *bat-ṣîyyôn,* "daughter Zion," is a slightly affectionate term for the population of Jerusalem (Floyd 2008).

because in you were found / the transgressions of Israel. The Hebrew words for the trespasses are of too general a character to reach any conclusions as to which part of the moral code was infringed upon.

1:14. *Therefore, give a parting gift*. The adverb *lākēn* has its traditional function of introducing the announcement of a judgment. The noun *šillûḥîm,* "dismissal (gift)," occurs only three times in the Hebrew Bible (Exod 18:12, 1 Kgs 9:6, Mic 1:14). The noun does not refer to a marriage gift or a dowry (as suggested by Hillers 1984, 27; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 232–33; Waltke 2007, 81–82; Jenson 2008, 116) but should be construed as the amount of money and/or goods that a man has to pay his former wife when the marriage is annulled and he takes a new wife. In Ugarit, this noun was deified as one of the seven goddesses (*kṯrt*) for marital affairs: *tlḫḥ,* "Thillakhuha" (De Moor 2020, 107).

Someone is summoned to give such a gift to Moreshet-Gath. The context does not allow one to identify this person, although some suggestions have been made, for example, Jerusalem (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 232). In my opinion, this imperative at the beginning of the third subsection of 1:10–16 stands parallel to the imperative at the beginning of the first subsection: "Do not proclaim in Gath!" The giving of this dismissal gift stands metaphorically for the annulment of God's relation with the inhabitants of the Shephelah. This is a ground for mourning.

to Moreshet-Gath. On Moreshet-Gath, see NOTES at 1:1. The town is most probably to be identified with modern Tell aj-Judeideh in the agricultural hinterland of Gath (Levin 2018, 447).

The houses of Achzib. A town *'akzîb,* "Achzib," occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Josh 15:44, 19:29; Judg 1:31). The town might be identical with *kĕzîb,* "Chezib" (Gen 38:5) and *kozēbā',* "Cozeba" (1 Chr 4:22; see van der Woude 1976, 56). Joshua 15:44 locates Achzib near Mareshah, mentioned in Mic 1:15. Achzib can be identified with modern Horvat Lahnin/Tell el-Beiḍā (Klein and Shai 2016; Levin 2018, 447; De Moor 2020, 108).

Targum Jonathan construes the "houses" of Achzib as idolatrous sanctuaries. This interpretation gives sense to the plural that should not be changed into a singular Bet-Achzib (contra Wellhausen 1963, 137). Demsky (1966; see also Utzschneider 1999, 82; Waltke 2007, 82–83; Jenson 2008, 116) assumes, on the basis of 2 Chr 4:21–23, an almost industrial complex for the production of pottery in Achzib and renders "the factories of Achzib."

will be a deception to the kings of Israel. The noun *'akzāb,* "deception," indicating the fate of Achzib, is clearly a pun on the name of the town since it contains the same consonants. The contexts of the adjective *'akzāb,* "deceptive," in Jer 15:18 and Job 6:15, in which a deceptive stream or wadi is referred to, suggest that in Mic 1:14 the destruction of the houses of Achzib by a suddenly streaming wadi is implied. Achzib will be as disappointing as a dry wadi for the traveler.

1:15. *Once more, I will bring a conqueror to you*. The Hebrew word *yorēš,* "conqueror," is an active participle of the verb *yāraš* (on the translation, see Lohfink 1983). The word is clearly a wordplay on the toponym Maresha, which, in a popular etymology, may be construed as deriving from the same verb: "residents of conqueror-town, a conqueror will attack you."

The word *'ābî*, generally rendered with "I will bring," is construed by Runions (2001, 132) as "my father." Since this reading has no support in the ancient versions, it should be rejected.

inhabitant of Maresha. This town is mentioned eight times in the Hebrew Bible. Joshua 15:44 mentions Maresha in a late monarchic list of Judaean strongholds. The occurrences in the books of Chronicles underscore the location of Maresha in the Shephelah, as does its appearance on the Madeba map (see NOTES at Mic 1:1). The town was located at present-day Tell Maresha/Tell Sandahanna (see Haupt 1910, 215; Negev and Gibson 2001, 315; Jenson 2008, 117*).* In Roman times, the important city of Eleutheropolis was built on this site. There is no reference to mourning in this line.

He will come to Adullam. The city *'adullām,* "Adullam," had been a hideout for David (1 Sam 22:1) and later became a fortress (2 Chr 11:7). The town was located on a hilltop now known as Khirbet esh-Sheikh Madkour (Andersen and Freedman 2000,

211). It controlled trade and traffic, and hence also military movements, going through the valley of Elah and leading up to Jerusalem. The preposition *'ad* alliterates with the name of the town.

the glory of Israel. The divine *kābôd,* "glory, splendor, majesty," generally refers to the aniconic and unfathomable presence of YHWH. The construction "glory of Israel" occurs only at Mic 1:15 and should be construed as a reference to the presence of the God of Israel. There is a minor exegetical problem in this verse. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the "divine splendor" is seen as a means by which God supports and comforts his people. In Ezekiel 43, the aniconic return of God from exile to the temple in Jerusalem is depicted as the return of his *kābôd*. To describe the action of the return of the divine glory, the verb *bô',* "to come," is used in Ezek 43:2, 3. In Isa 60:13, this verb is used to describe the coming of the glory of Lebanon, which will bring all sorts of fruit trees to Jerusalem. On analogy to these texts, Mic 1:15 should be construed as a prophecy of salvation: recovery will come to Adullam. This reading, however, does not fit the context; therefore, I suggest that we see in this verse the dark side of the divine glory. What will come to Adullam is the destructive side of the divine power.

The LXX reads "the daughter of Israel," probably in order to construct a parallelism with "daughter of Zion" in 1:13. The Vulgate did not adopt this reading. Targum Jonathan presents a paraphrase, "to Adullam they will come and go up, to the territory of the land of Israel." In doing so, the targum reads the line as an act against Adullam, seeing the unknown "comers" as the instrument of the dark side of God's glory.

There are no references to mourning in this line.

1:16. *Shear and shave*. The verb *qāraḥ,* "to shear, make bald," as a reference to the mere act of shaving one's hair from one's head, occurs one time in the Hebrew Bible (Lev 21:5; see Olyan 2004, 113; De Moor 2020, 111). All the other instances refer to shearing as a mourning rite (Jer 16:6; Ezek 27:31 [ET 27:34], 29:18; Mic 1:16).

The almost synonymous verb *gāzaz,* "to shave," has a parallel semantic range. The verb is used for the act of shaving, for instance, of sheep (Gen 31:19, 38:13; Deut 15:19; 1 Sam 25:2, 4; Isa 53:7). On some occasions in the Hebrew Bible, "shaving" is part of a mourning rite (Job 1:20, Jer 7:29, Mic 1:16). Shaving one's hair and making the head bald are acts of going into liminality and as such, separating from "normal life." Bald mourners set themselves temporarily outside the society not affected by grief (Jeremias 2007, 143–44; Olyan 2004, 111–23).

because of the children of your delight. The noun *ta'anûg,* "delight, pleasure, luxury," refers to an item of great emotional importance to which a person is connected by bonds of love and empathy (see Song 7:7 and various verses in Ben Sira). The children, both sons and daughters, were the real darlings, but not in a shallow, sentimental way (contra R. L. Smith 1984, 23), of the 2.f.s. character addressed in the feminine imperatives of this verse. The author probably refers to the city of Lachish, or the whole of the Shephelah, which is summoned to mourn over the fate of their children.

Enlarge your baldness like that of an eagle. For the act of "making greater," a nonstandard verb is used. Instead of *rbb* or *gdl,* Hi., the causative of the verb *rāḥab,* "be wide," hence "make wide," is present.

The noun *qorḥâ,* "baldness," could refer to an already existing bald spot, or, in combination with the verb *rāḥab,* Hi., indicate a thorough and deeply felt mourning rite (Dempster 2017, 74).

The Hebrew noun *nèšèr* is a generic term for both "eagle" and "vulture." Many scholars identify the *nèšèr* in 1:16 with the griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) that exists to this day in the Near East (King 1988, 132; van der Woude 1976, 58; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 238; Jenson 2008, 117; De Moor 2020, 112). This vulture, however, does not have a bald spot; its head is covered with white down, making it look bald from a distance. I would prefer to identify the *nèšèr* in 1:16 with the lappet-faced or Nubian vulture (*Torgos tracheliotos*). This bird, which lives in eastern Africa but also in the Negev, has a bald head and neck (Campbell 2015). Being scavengers, vultures stand as symbols for the coming destruction. The "baldness of the 'eagle/vulture' Jerusalem" refers to the city's loss of the villages mentioned (Cruz 2016, 115–17).

because they will go away from you into exile. The verb *gālāh,* "to go into exile," is here construed with the preposition *min,* indicating that the children will be moved away from their mother. There are no compelling reasons why this verb form should not be construed as a *perfectum propheticum* (contra De Moor 2020, 113–14). In the Neo-Assyrian Empire, deportation of parts of the population of conquered areas was a method used to break and silence opposition against the central power. Almost always, there was a two-way movement. A conquered area was deprived of its elite and artisans, while people from other recently "Assyrianized" areas were forced to settle in the partly emptied land (see Oded 1979; Sano 2020). The memory of the deportation of parts of the populations of the Northern Kingdom and the grief that was evoked was very much alive (see Becking 2018).

Comments

After the words of doom for Samaria and Jerusalem, the divine judgment now reaches the area of origin of Micah: the Shephelah. Van der Woude (1976, 19–22) assumed that 1:2–16 comprised the written sediments of a speech delivered by Micah during a religious festival in the temple of Lachish. Although this idea is based on too many unverifiable assumptions, the basic idea is very helpful in understanding the chapter. With these words, Micah surprised the population of Lachish, who up to this point in the text could have felt safe from the judgment of YHWH that would strike the vicious capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem. The text sobers up the inhabitants of the region by proclaiming a situation of doom that will cause wailing and mourning. The words regarding an impending exile form the climax of the whole chapter.

Many people are inclined to accept a prophecy of doom addressed to someone else. There is always something in the conduct of other people that justifies their downfall. It is problematic when words of doom return to their place of origin.

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PART II
A PROPHETIC FUTUROLOGY (2–5)

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As noted in the Introduction, many scholars regard Micah 1–3 as a literary unit. Others take Micah 2–5 as a subsection in the book. The balance of arguments tips toward the latter position. Of special importance are two features: (1) the fact that the point of view shifts from Lachish in chapter 1 to Jerusalem in chapters 2–5, and (2) the conceptual coherence of Micah 2–5 as a two-dimensional prophetic futurology, as I mentioned in the Introduction and elaborate in the pages that follow.

Woe Oracle (2:1–5)

2

[1]Woe to you who devise wickedness
and who plan evil on their beds,
who execute it by the light of the morning,
because it is in the power of their hands.
[2]When they desire fields,
they rob,
and houses,
they take.
They extort a fellow and his house,
a man and his inherited land.
[3]Therefore, thus says YHWH:
"Behold, I will devise an evil against this clan
out of which you cannot remove your necks.
You shall not walk haughtily
because this will be an evil time.
[4]On that day, one will recite a saying over you,
there will be bitter wailing, weeping,
namely:
'We are completely destroyed.
The portion of my people, he changed.
How he has removed it from me!
He has divided our fields among the rebellious!'
[5]You, however, will have no one
who will cast by lot the measuring line in the community of YHWH."

Introduction

The first unit is composed as a woe oracle. This term refers to a literary genre in which a person or a group is bewailed before any evil has happened to them. The genre elaborates on the mourning cry with which a person is mourned after that person's death. In applying this form to the living, an author classifies the life of a person or a group as having reached a dead end: a mourning cry will be their inevitable fate (Westermann 1964, 137–42; Janzen 1972; Hillers 1984, 31; Wagenaar 2001a, 208–20; Gignilliat 2019, 102–3). A woe oracle traditionally consists of three elements: address, accusation, and announcement. The address indicates the person or people "bewailed" (2:1a); the accusation contains a list of wrongdoing and trespasses that form the reason for punishment (2:1b–2); and the announcement is a description of doom and disaster (2:3–5).

Since 2:3 functionally fits the composition of 2:1–5, there is no need to assume that 2:3—which contains a weak intertextual link with Amos 5:13, that is, the words *ʿēt rāʿāh hîʾ,* "this is an evil time," occur in both texts—would be a redactional addition. Werse (2019, 220–24) argues that Mic 2:3 is part of the Four Redaction I. Because verse 5 is the announcement of judgment, it is directly addressed to the wrongdoers (Rudolph 1975, 51–55; Wagenaar 2001a, 73). Schart (1998, 183–84) attributes the two glosses (2:3aβ and 3bα) to the D-redaction that connected various parts of the Book of the Twelve. With Cook (2004, 82–84), I assume the section to be authentic.

Notes

2:1. *Woe to you who devise wickedness*. The particle *hôy* contains a warning, but to render the word with "warning" leads to a breaking up of a well-known language form (contra Smith-Christopher 2015, 80). The verb *ḥāšab,* "to think, consider, plan," refers to an intentional mental act of the accused (Kessler 1999, 114–15). The noun *ʾāwèn* indicates a deceitful act of injustice. The word qualifies the deeds described in verse 2 as breaches in the moral code.

and who plan evil on their beds. The verb *pāʿal,* "to make, do," is a container verb, describing all kinds of human actions. In parallelism with *ḥāšab* it refers to deliberate or planned acts. The noun *raʿ,* "evil," is a generic term for wrongdoing. The word qualifies the deeds described in verse 2 as breaches in the moral code. The expression "to plan evil" fits the context and should not be seen as a gloss (as proposed, for instance, by van der Woude 1976, 68; see the criticism in Waltke 2007, 93).

The adverbial adjunct of place functions as an adverbial adjunct of time. The evil plans are wrought during morning twilight. In many cultures, the night is construed as a period of uncertainty and possible failure. Hence it is advisable not to make plans during that time (e.g., Melbin 1987; Heijnen 2005). The word *miškāb,* "bed," is a subtle indication of the wealth of the accused. Such a couch or lying bed is seen as an object of luxury (see, e.g., 2 Kgs 4:10, Job 7:13, Hos 7:14, Song 3:1; van der Woude 1976, 68). Willis (1967) associated "bed" with "dream," suggesting that the evil plans were only dreams (criticized by Waltke 2007, 93–94).

who execute it by the light of the morning. The transgressions contrived in the fading darkness are materialized at the break of day. This does not imply a differentiation between "sins of thought" and "sins as action" but underscores the urgent determination

of the accused (Dempster 2017, 85). In the ancient Near East, the sun was seen as the guarantee of social order. Its rise in the morning was construed as the end of evil. The fact that privileged people nevertheless pursued their evil acts is to be seen as a breach of the inherent order (Kessler 1999, 115).

because it is in the power of their hands. The noun *'ēl* does not refer to a deity but to the force of human beings (Renaud 1977, 82–83; McKane 1998, 60; Kessler 1999, 115; Waltke 2007, 95; De Moor 2020, 130). A comparable use of the noun is found in Neh 5:5, *wĕ'ên lĕ'ēl yādēnû,* "it is not in the power of our hands" (see also Gen 31:29, Deut 28:32, Prov 3:27, Sir 14:11, 4QApLam[a] 1.1.2). The LXX and Vulgate render *'ēl* with "god."

2:2. *When they desire fields*. The first *wāw copulativum* functions as an indication of a protasis, while the second introduces an apodosis (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §32.1.2; Wagenaar 2001a, 66; Waltke 2007, 95). The verb *ḥāmad,* "to desire, covet," reflects the mental act of a human being that leads to the strong wish to acquire an object not yet in the possession of that person. The Hebrew Bible contains texts that mention proper desire (Ps 119:11, Isa 53:2) and improper desire (especially Exod 20:17, Deut 5:21; see Hillers 1984, 33; Kessler 1999, 117; De Moor 2020, 131–32). In the Decalogue it is stated: "You shall not covet (verb *ḥāmad*) your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male slave, or his female slave, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exod 20:17, NASB). Although it is uncertain when the Decalogue received its present form, it is clear that the author of Micah 2 refers to a longstanding element in the moral code of ancient Israel (Miller 2009, 389–98; Dempster 2017, 85–86; Gignilliat 2019, 103–6).

they rob. The verb *gāzal,* "to rob," refers to a forceful act of "taking away." Elsewhere in the book of Micah (3:2), the verb has the connotation "to tear off the skin, flail." The image evoked is that of the accused violently robbing others of their inherited homesteads.

and houses, / they take. The verb *nāśā'* generally has the meaning "to lift." The text of 2:2 evokes a graphic image of the accused heisting the houses of their compatriots (see Smith-Christopher 2015, 80). De Moor (2020, 132) connects these acts with the assumed influx of refugees from the Northern Kingdom after the Assyrian conquest of Samaria. Note, however, that this migration is still an unproven proposition.

Both objects, fields and houses, are listed in the commandment in Deut 5:21: "you shall not desire (verb *'āwāh*) your neighbor's house or field." The acts of the accused are thus breaches of the religious moral code. Historically, this taking of houses and fields should be read against the changes in society and the economy (see the Introduction). The shift to a free-market way of producing goods resulted in a division between poor and rich. When the poor were unable to pay their debts, as a result of crop failure caused by drought or military actions, they were forced to "give" their possessions to the rich (Bendor 1996, 207–83; McNutt 1999, 143–81; Boer 2015; Smith-Christopher 2015, 83–85). The new economic system shattered the traditional ideas of solidarity and equal opportunity.

They extort a fellow and his house. The verb *'āšaq* qualifies the acts of "taking" and "robbing" as forms of extortion. By riding on the waves of the economic revival, the rich oppress and extort their fellow Israelites. Both verbs—*'āšaq* and *gāzal,* "to extort" and "to rob"—stand parallel in a text describing a ritual for the removal of sin: to be

cleansed from sin a person has to "restore what he took by robbery or acquired by extortion" (Lev 5:3 = ET 6:4, NASB). In the ideal religious community, people respect the possessions of others and the safety and shelter they provide for them (De Moor 2020, 132).

a man and his inherited land. The plot of land taken into possession by the accused is qualified as a *naḥălāh,* "hereditary possession." This noun expresses tradition and continuity and the belief in God as the ultimate owner of the land. The noun assumes an idea of equality in that each family "owns" a part of the land of God. According to tradition, the whole land of Israel was allotted to tribes, clans, and families through the casting of lots (Josh 14–19). This ownership was inalienable (Hillers 1984, 33; Bendor 1996, 129–33; van Wyk 2018). Moreover, the use of the noun *naḥălāh* might suggest that the ancestors of the present owners of an allotted plot of land were buried on this piece of land and that the veneration of the ancestors yielded prosperity (Westbrook 1991, 24–35; Stavrakopoulou 2010, 1–28). There is a clear intertextual connection with the story of the vineyard of Naboth (1 Kgs 21; Gignilliat 2019, 5–6).

2:3. *Therefore, thus says YHWH*. The adverb *lākēn* has its traditional function of introducing a judgment announcement referring back to the preceding lines (McKane 1998, 65; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 375; Waltke 2007, 96; Dempster 2017, 80; De Moor 2020, 133). The traditional messenger formula sets the prophet in the role of an envoy, implying his words are more than a human delusion (Finsterbusch 2017).

Behold, I will devise an evil against this clan. The same verb *ḥāšab,* "to think, consider, plan," is used here as in 2:1. This is a sign of the conformity between act and punishment. In the background stands the concept of the *ius talionis:* the accused will be punished for their deeds on the principle of "an eye for an eye."

The noun *rā'āh,* "evil," echoes the noun *ra'* in 2:1. The word veils the elements of the judgment to come but reveals the character of it: the coming misfortune of the accused is to be seen as a deed of YHWH.

The noun *mišpāḥāh,* "clan," is originally a kinship term indicating the broader circle of those related to each other by family ties (Waltke 2007, 97–98). In 2:3 the noun is used figuratively; it refers to a group of people with the same mentality, a coterie of the crooked rich. A translation with "generation" erases the idea of a specific group (contra Wagenaar 2001a, 67). The pronoun *zō't,* "this," is used in a dismissing manner (van der Woude 1976, 69).

Out of which you cannot remove your necks. The impending evil is presented as irreversible. In the background stands the image of an ox that is bound when plowing or threshing by a yoke from which the animal is not able to free itself. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in ancient Near Eastern texts, the image of the yoke is applied to indicate the subordinate position in a vassal relationship (e.g., Ps 2:3; Jer 2:20; 5:5, 28; 30:8; Nah 1:13; see Ruwe and Weise 2002).

You shall not walk haughtily. The adverb *rômāh,* "haughtily," is unique in the Hebrew Bible, as is the combination with the verb *hālak*. The adverb is related to the noun *rûm,* "haughtiness." This noun is used dismissively for the conduct of people who are overly proud (e.g., Isa 2:11, Jer 48:29, Prov 21:4; Waltke 2007, 98–99). The negated expression stands in parallelism with the announcement "not to remove your necks." The expression "to walk haughtily" indicates a form of conduct in which people who hold their heads up high consider themselves to be unassailable.

Because this will be an evil time. In the coming time, it will turn out that those who walk haughtily are more vulnerable than they ever thought. The same clause occurs in Amos 5:13. It can be assumed that this was a traditional phrase to end a woe oracle (De Moor 2020, 134).

2:4. *On that day, one will recite a saying over you*. A *māšāl* is a wisdom saying based on an accumulated understanding of reality (Robinson and Horst 1964, 134; Kessler 1999, 121; Schöpflin 2002; Smith-Christopher 2015, 86–87). A proverblike saying is absent in Mic 2:4. Instead, the readers are confronted with the weeping voice of the accused. It makes no sense to try to reconstruct a *māšāl* here or to guess at its phrasing, although an ancient analogy to "chickens come home to roost" springs to mind. The function of the announcement is to confront the accused with the final effect of their deeds.

There will be bitter wailing, weeping. To weep, *nāhāh,* is an expression of grief. The prophet announces a situation in which "bitter weeping" will be unavoidable. The repetition with the word *nihyāh,* "wailing," has a paranomastic function and should not be deleted (with Kessler 1999, 119–20; Utzschneider 1999, 105; Wagenaar 2001a, 69–70; Waltke 2007, 100; De Moor 2020, 135; contra, for instance, Haupt 1910, 208; Wellhausen 1963, 138; Mays 1976, 60; Willi-Plein 1971, 76; Shaw 1993, 68).

Namely. The verb form *'āmar,* "he/it says," has "weeping" as its subject. Hence, the form functions as an introduction of the words that go along with the weeping. This also accounts for the presence of first-person plural forms in the phrasing of the lament. It is the voice of the accused that will be heard. By implication, there is no need to change the MT into *lĕʾmor,* "saying" (contra Sellin 1922, 270; Wellhausen 1963, 138; Robinson and Horst 1964, 134; Shaw 1993, 68).

We are completely destroyed. The verb *šādad,* "to destroy," is also used in a paranomastic construction implying that it is combined with an intensifying infinitive stressing the harshness of the destruction to come (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §35.3.1b). De Moor (2020, 135–36) suggests rendering the verb *šādad* not as "to destroy" but construing it as an Assyrian loanword, "to measure," which seemingly fits the context. In Akkadian *šadādu* could mean "to draw (a curtain, a line)," but it has a variety of other possible translations (see *CAD Š*/1, 20–32). However, it is only in an inscription from the time of Nabopolassar, in Neo-Babylonian dialect, that the verb with the meaning "to measure" can be found: "The surveyors staked out (*iš-ta-aṭ-ṭu-um*) the ground plan" (*Vorderasiatische Bibliothek* 4 62, ii:19). This observation makes the proposal less attractive.

the portion of my people, he changed. The noun *ḥēlèq* refers to the "share" or "portion" that was distributed to a tribe, clan, or family as a hereditary land holding. In the stories of the "conquest" of the land of Israel, it is narrated that these "portions" were distributed among the people (e.g., Josh 13–14; 15:13; Waltke 2007, 101–2; van Wyk 2018). The *ḥēlèq* is not unlike the *naḥălāh,* a "hereditary possession" (2:2), and is most probably a retrojection of later circumstances into the ideology of the collective entrance into the land.

The verb *mûr* in the Hi. refers to the process of the alienation of property into the hands of others (De Moor 2020, 136). The LXX *katemerèthè,* "he measured," has obviously read a form of the verb *mdd,* "to measure" (Willi-Plein 1971, 76; van der Woude 1976, 71; Jacobs 2001, 236). There is, however, no need to change the MT at this point (*pace* van der Woude 1976, 71; McKane 1998, 69–70; Wagenaar 2001a, 70–71).

How he has removed it from me! The verb *mûš* has the connotation "to give away." In the Hi. construed with the preposition *le,* the verb refers to an act of separation. The plots of land will be alienated from the accused, leaving them empty handed. There is no need to suppose a connection with Arabic *massa,* "to strike with misfortune," and render with "how he strikes me with misfortune!" (*pace* van der Woude 1976, 71). The translation of the LXX with a form of the verb *kolúoo,* "to prevent," makes no sense in the present context (van der Woude 1976, 71).

He has divided our fields among the rebellious! The noun *šôbēb* is derived from the verb *šûb,* "to turn." The noun is attested three times in the Hebrew Bible (Jer 31:22, 49:4; Mic 2:4). In each instance, it refers to a person or a group that turned away from an accepted or hoped-for way of life. In Jer 31:22, Israel is rebuked for deviating from the path of YHWH. In Mic 2:4, the "accused" construe their compatriots as not having taken their road into a new economy. An emendation of *šôbēb* to **šādôd,* "ravager," is not supported by the ancient versions (contra Cathcart 1988).

There is a sense of bitter irony in this complaint. The "accused" weep beforehand and complain that the conqueror will "allot" (*ḥālaq,* Pi.) their "allotments" to those who had been deprived of their inherited portions of the land. The act of allotting pieces of land is beautifully depicted in a scene from the tomb chapel of Nebamun (around 1350 BCE). He was the accountant in charge of grain in the administration of the temple of Amun at Karnak. The scene depicts officials who are busy with their inspection of the fields. While a farmer checks the boundary marker of the field, two chariots are waiting under the shade of a sycamore fig tree. They presumably transported the supervisors to the fields (see Middleton and Uprichard 2008).

2:5. *You, however, will have no one*. The word *lākēn* has a different meaning and function than in verse 3. In my view the element *lĕ* is to be construed as the emphatic *lĕ* II. This implies that here, *lākēn* does not have a causal but an adversative function (March 1974; Jongeling 1981; Wagenaar 2001a, 73–74; see also 1 Sam 28:2; Jer 2:33, 30:16; Mic 3:6; Aramaic, *TADEA* A4.2.8). The verb *hāyāh,* "to be," with the preposition *le* has the meaning of "to have." The particle *lō'* in combination with the verb *hāyāh* indicates the absence of an instance or person who could help the "accused" in times to come. The accused will be bereft of a helper at the time of the new measuring of the land.

who will cast by lot the measuring line in the community of YHWH. This clause is reminiscent of the tradition mentioned in Num 26:55 that the "land will be divided by lot" and of the tradition of the "lot" of Judah in Josh 15:1 (see De Vos 2003). The act of casting the lot was not seen in ancient Israel as the outcome of blind fate but as an expression of the will of YHWH (Kitz 2000; Van Wyk 2018). The clause assumes a redistribution of the land after the period of doom. The point in time for that redistribution is purposefully vague. Any identification with a return from the Assyrian or Babylonian exile breaks the poetic character of the language.

The noun *ḥèbèl,* "rope, flex," has in this context the specific meaning of a "measuring line." In various texts in the Hebrew Bible such a rope is used to measure the boundaries between plots of land (see also 2 Sam 8:2; Amos 7:17; Zech 2:1; Pss 16:6, 78:55).

The noun *qāhāl,* "assembly, congregation, community, gathering," is a socio-religious term referring to the idealized community of single-minded and God-fearing

Israelites. Such a community could be called to serve together in an armed conflict (e.g., Judg 20:2), solve questions of a civil or judicial character (e.g., Neh 5:13), worship YHWH (e.g., 1 Kgs 8:65), receive God's commands (e.g., Deut 9:10), or return from exile (e.g., Ezra 2:64). In the book of Micah, *qāhāl* refers to the community that will be established in Judah after the impending doom and in the time of YHWH's reestablished generosity toward his people. The "accused" will have no share in that community (see Boer 2015, 72–73).

Comments

The addressees of the woe oracle are not mentioned by name. They are qualified by their deeds enumerated in the accusation.

The accusation, although phrased poetically, is sharp and clear. Those who profited from the changing economic circumstances are rebuked not for being wealthier than others but for the way they accumulated their possessions by violating the social and religious codes of the community (Robinson and Horst 1964, 133–34; Rudolph 1975, 51–55; Utzschneider 1999, 101–10; Boer 2015, 214–16; O'Brien 2015, 19–29).

The announcement of doom is clear but is unwelcome to the "accused." Upon them an evil will come that will result in the loss of all of their properties. The lands they had taken from their impoverished fellows will be taken away from them. In the final dispensation, there will be no place for them in the newly established community. The Jerusalem-centered system will disappear. The inhabitants of the territory of Judah will return to the covenant norms of old. The section does not refer to exile or deportation.

Wealth as such is not a problem, but exuberant wealth will be destructive both for the economy and for the quality of life of those who are defending their fortune.

Daunting Defense (2:6–7)

2 [6]"You shall not preach!"
they preach;
"they shall not preach on these matters;
he will not turn away the ignominies.
[7]May that be proclaimed, house of Jacob?
Is the spirit of YHWH that impatient?
Are these his doings?"
Are my words not good for those who walk straight?

Introduction

Micah 2:6–7 is complicated. Scholars agree that these two verses contain a rather fierce reaction of the "accused" (2:1–5) to the message of Micah. The extent and coherence of their reaction are debated. Willis (1970) considers verses 6 and 7 as two independent reactions. Van der Woude (1976, 76–77; also Gignilliat 2019, 113–17) construes the two verses as belonging together but takes verse 7c as part of the next section since he assumes that the 1.c.s. suffix in "my words" refers to Micah. In my opinion, this suffix should be construed as referring to YHWH, making verse 7c a quotation by the "accused" of a divine revelation.

I disagree with those scholars (R. L. Smith 1984, 26; Andersen and Freedman 2006, 296–97) who propose that this and the following section present a debate between various prophetic positions. Not only are words from the semantic field of prophecy absent; the quarrel in these verses is about "theology." The section presents YHWH as a God of patience who is not ready for a rapid reaction to acts of wrongdoing.

There are no compelling reasons why this unit should be construed as an addition by an early exilic redactor from the school of Jeremiah (with Cook 2004, 84–85; contra Wagenaar 2001a, 220–29). The unit as such is coherent.

Notes

2:6. *You shall not preach!* The verb *nāṭap* has as its basic meaning "to drip." In texts with a theophanic connection, the verb is used to describe what comes down from heaven (e.g., Ps 68:9, Amos 9:13, Joel 4:18). Metaphorically, the verb could stand for the "flowing of words," such as a prophetic speech or sermon that in a way irritates the listeners on account of the repetition of inconvenient words (Ezek 21:2, 7; Amos 7:16; Mic 2:6, 11; Sellin 1922, 272–73; Rudolph 1975, 60–61; Kessler 1999, 130; Smith-Christopher 2015, 90–91; Arena 2020, 157). The prohibitive phrasing reminds the reader of the syntactical construction of many of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20 // Deut 5; Miller 2009).

they preach. The third-person plural pronoun clearly refers back to the "accused" in the previous section. They feel attacked by the rebukes of Micah.

They shall not preach on these matters. Since this clause is part of the direct speech of the accused elite, the pronoun "they" refers to Micah and his support group (see Cook 2004, 209–10).

he will not turn away the ignominies. The verb *sûg,* Ni., "to turn away," makes perfect sense in this context (see also Wagenaar 2001a, 77; contra De Moor 2020, 140–41). Those accused by Micah assess his words as an "insult," *kĕlimmāh,* that unfortunately will not be taken away (contra Willis 1970, 74–75; Hillers 1984, 34; Shaw 1993, 69; Kessler 1999, 126–27; Smith-Christopher 2015, 91–92). They are presented by the author as people who see Micah as a disgraceful person.

2:7. *May that be proclaimed, house of Jacob?* There is no need to change the word *hĕʾāmûr*. Some scholars propose to read *hāʾōmēr,* "the house of Jacob is saying" (Roorda 1869, 45; Willis 1970, 81; R. L. Smith 1984, 23; De Moor 2020, 141). This proposal, however, is syntactically awkward: in Biblical Hebrew, the article is never combined with a *nomen regens*. In this construction, *hā-* cannot be the interrogative pronoun, and the relative particle is never placed in first position in Biblical Hebrew. Many scholars read *hĕʾārûr,* "is the house of Jacob cursed?," which makes sense in the context but is without support from the ancient versions (Sellin 1922, 273; Robinson and Horst 1964, 135; Mays 1976, 66). Van der Woude (1976, 80–81) offers an ingenious proposal, reading *hĕʾèmîr,* a causative of the verb *ʾmr* here meaning "to grant, to concede, to approve." He construes YHWH as the subject of this verb form and considers the clause as an early form of a covenant formula. In van der Woude's view, the "accused" refers to the security implied in God's approval of the covenant. As such, his rendering of 2:7a makes sense: "He has conceded it, O house of Jacob," but the syntactical connection with the next line is awkward and rather exceptional. In my view, the form *hĕʾāmûr* should be construed as the *qal* passive participle preceded by the interrogative pronoun *hā* (with Hillers 1984, 35; Shaw 1993, 69; Kessler 1999, 127; Wagenaar 2001a, 77–79; Jacobs 2001, 238). The verb *ʾāmar* has the connotation of "to proclaim" in this context. The question by the accused refers back to Micah's dripping of his prophetic proclamation in 2:6.

Is the spirit of YHWH that impatient? The *rûᵃḥ,* "spirit," should not be conceptualized in the framework of an anachronistic Platonic dualism. The noun refers to an inalienable part of God's body and should be construed as his "organ for his guiding sympathy" (Gericke 2017).

The verb *qāṣar,* "to be short," with the noun *rûᵃḥ,* forms the idiomatic expression "to be impatient" (see also Job 21:4). The "accused" accuse Micah of denying that God is *'èrèk 'appayim,* "long-suffering" (see, e.g., Exod 34:6). On the basis of the Ugaritic expression *qṣr npš,* that could be rendered with "impotent" (*KTU* 1.16 vi: 33–34; 1.40 14–15; 22–23; 30–32; 39–40), and some scholars propose translating Mic 2:7 with "is God impotent?," assuming that in the view of the accused, Micah denied God his power (Haak 1982; Wagenaar 2001a, 79). Since Ugaritic *qṣr* generally means "impatient," this proposal should be abandoned (see Renaud 1977, 100, 115; Utzschneider 1999, 116; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 309–11; Jeremias 2007, 145; De Moor 2020, 141).

Are these his doings? The "accused" accuse Micah of misunderstanding God's acts.

Are my words not good for those who walk straight? The adjective *yāšār,* "straight, upright," contains a moral assessment. To "walk straight" implies a way of life that concurs with the accepted moral code. The bone of contention here is the question, "Which code?" Is it the kind of moral conduct assumed by Micah in his accusations? Or is it the value system that the "accused" rely upon? The word recurs in the feminine in Mic 3:9, where the leaders of the nations are accused of "twisting what is upright."

Comments

The announcements in 2:1–5 meet opposition. The "accused" feel unable to accept the words of doom. They are presented as people who hide themselves behind their faith in the security offered by the concept of God's enduring sympathy. In fact, they accuse Micah of having an inadequate theology. They assume that he does not believe in the goodness of God and his ability to forgive trespasses (De Moor 2020, 141). In fact, they abuse the balanced view of God in Exod 34:6–7: belief in divine mercy can never be an excuse for bad acts.

In the present age such an accusation could be healthy for the fabric of society. The moment people start thinking that they have "God on their side"—and by implication, that God is not on the side of others—there is a potential disruption of the social fabric. Micah's accusation functions as a summons for a multidimensional concept of God.

Accumulating Accusations (2:8–11)

2

[8]Recently, my people stood up as an enemy!
You stripped off a mantle of majesty
    from those who pass by in trust,
    turning away from war.
[9]You expel the women of my people
    from the house of her comfort.
You take away from their children
    my glory, forever.
[10]Arise and go!
    For this is not a resting place.
Since being polluted, she is pregnant,
    with a grievous labor pain.
[11]If a man, chasing emptiness,
    was deceiving with falsehood:
        "I preach to you concerning wine and strong drink!,"
he would be the preacher of this people.

Introduction

Micah 2:8–11 contains a variety of elements. After an exclamation of furious astonishment, there follows a set of three accusatory observations concerning the way in which the elites have treated the commoners. The enriched are summoned to leave the morally polluted land. The section ends with a remark on "true" versus "false" prophecy. Optimistic messages are seen as misleading. These seemingly contradictory elements, however, present a coherent message: the conduct of the elite has turned the land into a place of chaos. In that situation, the delivery of a feel-good message is out of order. Although the section makes a jumbled impression, the conceptual coherence makes literary-critical or redaction-historical interventions unnecessary.

Various scholars have tried to smooth out the assumed fracture in the section by reconstructing verse 8a as a syntactical parallel to verses 8b–9 (e.g., Budde 1920). However, there is no evidence for this textual interruption.

There are no compelling reasons why this unit should be construed as an addition by an early exilic redactor from the school of Jeremiah (with Cook 2004, 86; contra Wagenaar 2001a, 220–29). Westermann (1964, 144; 1991, 201) assumes that the polemic against the prophets of salvation (verse 11) should be seen as a later addition. I disagree, since this verse perfectly fits the pattern of a disputation.

Notes

2:8. *Recently, my people stood up as an enemy!* The adverb *'ètmôl,* a secondary form of *temôl,* refers to a period directly before the "now" of the text (Shaw 1993, 70; Kessler 1999, 127; Jenson 2008, 126). Wellhausen's (1963, 138) suggestion to change the beginning of verse 8a into *we'ûlām 'attem,* "since eternity you have . . ." (also Budde 1920; Mays 1976, 67; Williamson 1997, 360–64; Jeremias 2007, 145) is ingenious; it would lead to the interpretation of this section as directed against the elite and would construct a nice parallelism with verse 8b (having a 2.m.p. verb form), but it has no grounding in the textual evidence (R. L. Smith 1984, 26; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 315–16; Jacobs 2001, 239; Runions 2001, 139; Waltke 2007, 117). The same must be said about the proposal to change *'ètmôl* into an adversative *wĕ'attem,* "but it is you!" (Renaud 1977, 117–18; Hillers 1984, 35).

The preposition *le* functions as a *lamed* of purpose (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §11.2.10d).

The *polel* of the verb *qûm* has the semantic force of a mostly hostile "standing up against" (*DCH* 7:231; Luker 1985, 12; Shaw 1993, 70; De Moor 2020, 142–43). The hostility in this verse is directed against God and not against an external enemy. There is no need to change the verb form into *tāqûmû,* "you stood up," although it offers a nice parallel with *tapšīṭûn* in verse 8b (Wellhausen 1963, 138; Budde 1920; Mays 1976, 67) since this section is shaped as a lecture against the elite (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 315–16; Wagenaar 2001a, 83).

You stripped off a mantle of majesty. The composite preposition *mimmûl* stresses the gravity of the offense. Changing the word into *mē'al,* "from off" (Wellhausen 1963, 138; Weiser 1949, 219), is not impossible but lacks support in the textual evidence (Waltke 2007, 117–18).

The Hebrew text seems to contain two synonyms in an asyndetic construction. The first noun, *śalmāh,* "mantle," is a variant of the more common *śimlāh,* "mantle" (metathesis; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 317). Both nouns occur some fifteen times in the Hebrew Bible, and both refer to a garment in general. In Exod 22:25 and Deut 24:13 it is commanded that a *śalmāh,* taken as a pledge, should be returned before sunset to its owner with the apparent goal that the person can protect himself or herself from the cold of the night and the heat of the sun. How problematic such a commandment could be becomes clear in an extrabiblical text—the Mesad Hashavyahu ostracon. In this inscription, a reaper complains to the governor that the landowner for whom he works would not return his garment—seized for an unclear reason—for the night: "If I am innocent of any wrong, [give back] my garment (*bgd*); and if not, it

is the governor's right to [consider my case] and send word to him so that he restores the garment of your servant. And do not let [the plea of your servant] be displeasing to him" (*KAI* 200:11–14).

Although a synonym, *bgd,* is used, it is clear that an act comparable to that referred to in Mic 2:8 is in view (*KAI* 200 = *CoS* 3, 41). The second noun in 2:8, *'èdèr,* is attested only three times in the Hebrew Bible. On the basis of the translations in the LXX and Vulgate, this noun is often understood as referring to a garment. The noun, however, is to be seen as a cognate of Phoenician and Punic *'dr,* "great, mighty, splendid." In Zech 11:13 the same word is used in an ironic way. The prophet is invited to throw at the potter a "splendid price." In my view, the noun *'èdèr* is used in a comparably ironic way here. The elite are reproached for taking away "a splendid mantle"; although the cloth might have looked like rags, to the owner it was a gown. A comparable motif is present in the Assyrian tale "The Poor Man from Nippur," where the protagonist "was dressed in garments that had had no change" but nevertheless took pride in his life (Ottervanger 2016). This interpretation also implies that there is no need to change *śalmāh* into *šĕlōmōh,* "peaceful." The act of taking away the "splendid mantle" was far from peaceful. The view that *'èdèr* would refer to a "mantle of peace" is difficult to defend (contra Smith-Christopher 2015, 94–95).

from those who pass by in trust, / turning away from war. The passive participle pluralis *šûbêy* is often seen as meaning "returning," which would imply that those who were bereft of their garments came back from war (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 320). This interpretation, however, does not make much sense. In the ancient Near East, the defeated were either killed or taken in order to work as prisoners of war. Even if they were allowed to return to their homelands, they would not have many possessions. In my view, the verb *šûb* has a rather specific meaning in this context: "to turn away, abate" (*DCH* 8:286). In other words, the people referred to were far from eager to participate in any battle (Shaw 1993, 70; Wagenaar 2001a, 84–85).

2:9. *You expel the women of my people*. The verb *gāraš,* "to expel," is used in the Pi. indicating the intensity of the act of alienating the women from their habitat (Vivian 1978). The verb is used in the *qal* in Exod 34:11 for the forced migration of the "peoples of the land" in favor of the Israelites. Although the 1.c.s. suffix in "my people" could refer to YHWH, I construe it as a reference to the prophetic "I," once more indicating the solidarity of deity and prophet with the *personae miserae* in Judah.

from the house of her comfort. The noun *ta'anūg* could give rise to a misunderstanding, the noun meaning "delight, luxury, delicacy." As with the "mantle of majesty" (2:8), wealth is not indicated. Comparable to the expression "children of your delight" in 1:16, the house of comfort in 2:9 refers to an item of great emotional importance to which a person is connected (Kessler 1999, 132–33; Jenson 2008, 127). There is no need to adjust 2:9 to 1:9, since the "house" may refer to children (Wellhausen 1963, 139). Amid the tides of time, this house, however humble, stands as a safe haven. A vast majority of scholars read the suffix *-hā* as the result of haplography of an original suffix *-hèm,* "their," referring back to the plural noun "women" (Willi-Plein 1971, 123). A singular suffix, however, fits in the context: each woman will be expelled from the house of her comfort.

You take away from their children / my glory, forever. The children of these women are bereft of *hadārî,* "my glory." The 1.c.s. suffix here refers not the prophetic "I," but

to YHWH. The passage is based on the view that in the unbroken lives of children, the divine glory is visible; this is comparable to the idea that the divine splendor shines through the ark. The suggestion of Allen (1976, 293) to connect *hadārî* with *naḥălāh,* "hereditary possession" (2:2), is ingenious but undervalues the fact that *hādār* is connected with land nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible (Andersen and Freedman 2006, 322).

2:10. *Arise and go!* The summons to act containing the verbs *qûm* and *hālak* is attested elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 13:17, 28:2; 1 Kgs 14:2, 17:9; 2 Kgs 8:1; Jer 13:4, 6; Jonah 1:2, 3:2). All instances express a sense of urgency.

For this is not a resting place. The noun *mĕnûḥāh,* here a *nomen locale,* "resting place," refers, like the "house of her comfort," to a safe haven. The transgressions of the elite had turned the land into a chaotic place from which it is best to flee.

Since being polluted, she is pregnant. The compound preposition *ba'ăbûr* should be rendered with "for the sake of" (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §11.3.3; Andersen and Freedman 2006, 325; Waltke 2007, 121) or "since," indicating the reason why the people should leave their abodes.

The verb form *ṭām'āh, qal* 3.f.s., should be construed as a descriptive verb relating the circumstances of the main verb. Pollution is here to be taken in a moral sense. By their conduct the elite have turned the divine inheritance into a land where Israel can no longer live according to God's moral imperatives.

Traditionally, the form *teḥabbēl* is construed as a Pi. imperfect 3.f.s. of the verb *ḥābal* II, "to destroy" (e.g., Haupt 1910, 209; Hillers 1984, 36; Shaw 1993, 70; Kessler 1999, 126; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 325–26). The root *ḥābal* has at least three different meanings (*DCH* 3:149–50). A derivation from the root *ḥābal* I, "to pledge," makes no sense in the context (Wagenaar 2001a, 89–90). Besides, *ḥābal* I is not attested in the D-stem. The root *ḥābal* III, however, is attested in the D-stem with the meaning "to be pregnant" (see Song 8:5, Ps 7:15; see also 1QHod 3.8; De Moor 2002a, 91–92; Bergmann 2008, 182, 195; De Moor 2020, 145). This rendering would explain the absence of a suffix that would indicate who or what is being destroyed. The pregnancy in this verse is both metaphorical and ironic. The conduct of the elite has made the land pregnant with doom. This makes the proposal to render with "take your horrible deposit" unnecessary (contra Jeremias 2007, 146).

with grievous labor pains. In line with the previous remark, I propose to vocalize *ḥēbèl,* "labor pains" (*DCH* 3:151; De Moor 2002a, 104), against the MT *ḥèbèl* II, "destruction." At Hos 13:13 the expression *ḥèblê yôlēdāh,* "the pains of childbirth," occurs. The Ni. participle *nimrāṣ,* "grievous, hurtful, causing sickness," underscores the painfulness of the reversal. I assume an intentional pun on *ḥèbèl,* "measuring line," in 2:5.

2:11. *If a man, chasing emptiness*. The particle *lû* introduces an optative clause (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §11.2.10i; Wagenaar 2001a, 91–92; different: a wish-particle Utzschneider 1999, 127). There is a minor textual problem, however. The Greek scroll Mur 88 clearly reads *l'* instead of *lû,* and the Old Greek translation—*oùdenòs*, "nobody"—as well as the Vulgate seem to support the negative particle. There is no need to change the MT here. The ancient versions just mentioned could have read *lw* as *lô*. The syntax of verse 11 is complex. I take 11a as the protasis: "If someone [said] 'I preach to you . . .'" The words "walking in wind and baseless falsehood" should

be construed as a subordinated clause within the protasis qualifying the "someone." Verse 11b contains the apodosis "he would be . . ."

In this poetic text, a preposition is left out before the noun *rûaḥ*. This implies that a rendering "walking in wind" is less preferable. I take *rûᵃḥ* to be object of the verb *hālak*. With Clines (*DCH* 7:429), I accept that the meaning of the noun in this verse is "emptiness, vanity" (see also Arena 2020, 158). The verb *hālak* has the specific meaning of "to go after, chase" (Wagenaar 2001a, 92–93).

was deceiving with falsehood. This clause is to be construed as an inverted *wᵉyiqṭol* X clause, implying that the stress is put on the noun and that *kizzēb* is the verb form of the protasis. The element *wāw* is to be construed as giving emphasis, not as a copulative. *Kizzēb* is a Pi. form of the verb *kzb* indicating the iterative character of the act of lying, hence "to deceive." The emphasized noun *šèqèr* indicates that the lies of this deceiver are leading his people astray into deception.

I preach to you concerning wine and strong drink! The verb *nāṭap,* repeated from verse 6, is used to describe the "flowing of words" such as a prophetic speech or sermon that in a way irritates the listeners on account of the repetition of inconvenient words. Through the repetition of the verb *nāṭap,* the imaginary "prophet" of verse 11 is closely associated with the elite.

The message of the imaginary "prophet" is summarized in two nouns, both indicating the pleasures of a life of luxury where the pain of living is mitigated by alcohol. The noun *šēkar,* "strong drink," is valued as an ingredient of a happy feast (e.g., Deut 14:26, Isa 24:7–11). On the other hand, texts in the Hebrew Bible caution against the abuse of drinking. Isaiah 28:7 warns the leaders of a nation that strong drink can make them unable to steer the country.

Durand (1982) has drawn attention to a passage in a prophetic letter from Mari: "Concerning the expedition my master is going to undertake: I have made them, man and woman, drink the 'signs,' afterwards I've asked them questions: The prophecy was very good for my master. In the same way I have questioned man and woman about Išme-Dagan: the prophecy concerning him was not good and his case is put under the foot of my master" (ARM 26, 207:2–4; Nissinen 2017, 41–43; a parallel expression is attested in ARM 26, 212: Rev 1′–2′; Nissinen 2017, 48–49). According to Durand, this text refers to a practice whereby prophecies occasionally were induced by wine. The mention of alcoholic beverages in Mic 2:11 then would suggest that the preacher brought to the scene by Micah would have prophesied under the influence of alcohol. This view has been challenged on the basis of the fact that the Mari documents do not reveal the character of the drinks and the observation that in Mic 2:11 the preposition *le* needs to be construed as an indication of the contents of the prophecy, not as the instrument by which the utterances were evoked (Rudolph 1975, 59; Wilcke 1983; Wagenaar 2001a, 94–95; Mtshiselwa 2018, De Moor 2020, 146–47). Two features should be mentioned that indicate that the act of prophesying under the influence should not be excluded as a possibility. In Isa 28:7 prophets are criticized:

> And these also stagger from wine
> and reel from beer:
> priests and prophets stagger from beer
> and are befuddled with wine;

they reel from beer,
they stagger when seeing visions,
they stumble when rendering decisions. (NIV)

Recently, remains of cannabis were found at an altar in Judahite Arad, indicating that the substance had been used in Iron Age Israel (Arie, Rosen, and Namdar 2020).

He would be the preacher of this people. The root *nāṭap* is used again. The noun *ʿām,* "people," forms an *inclusio* with "my people" (2:8). The noun refers to Judah in general.

Comments

This section ends with a reflection on the function of prophecy. Preachers of salvation and positive news may find a broad audience, but in the end their message is deceiving. The question of "true" versus "false" prophecy is contextualized to the situation in the time of the speaker. The grave transgressions of the religious and moral code by the ruling elite have created a moral pollution of the land of Judah and its inhabitants, especially those measures that had been forced upon the population by military power (Smith-Christopher 2015, 94–104). The threat of the invading Assyrians was countered by defensive building activities, such as Hezekiah's wall and water tunnel, which took money and workers away from agrarian contexts. This "pollution" should be construed as a metaphor for the moral bankruptcy of those in charge in Jerusalem. Instead of shielding and protecting those who had become victims of changing economic circumstances, they deprived them of their *securitas* by taking away a mantle and damaging the lives of the impoverished and weak mother and child. These acts break down the fabric of community and family (Boloje 2020). In such a situation, a prophecy of unfounded salvation or misplaced *certitudo* offers an opportunity to escape from reality instead of causing the hearers to face up to that reality. Such prophecy would be "opium for/of the poor" (McKinnon 2005).

In the uncertainty of the present time, it is often difficult to separate false hope from realistic scenarios for the future. The author of Micah 2–5 summons the present reader to look beyond the splendid wrapping of empty promises and to see through all sorts of conspiracy theories. The 2022 Russian military operation on the territory of the republic of Ukraine including the accompanying propaganda and rhetoric—from both sides—has made Micah's message fearsomely real.

Gathering of the Scattered Flock (2:12–13)

2 [12]I will certainly collect you completely, Jacob,
I will certainly gather the remnant of Israel,
I will set them together like sheep in the sheepfold,
like a flock in the midst of its pasture.
They will bustle with humanity.
[13]The one who made a breach goes up before them.
They break through, pass the gate,
and go out through it.
Their king will pass through before them,
namely YHWH, at their head.

Introduction

The character of Micah 2:12–13 is not clear at first glance. A superficial reading could lead to the assumption that here the prophecy of salvation referred to in 2:11 is articulated. This interpretation, however, does not account for two facts: first, that the sermon mentioned in 2:11 is imaginary, and second, that 2:12–13 presupposes a situation in which at least parts of the population live outside the land, something that is certainly not implied in 2:11.

A comparable remark should be made about the view of van der Woude (1969, 1976) that 2:12–13 are the words of the pseudo-prophetic opponents of Micah. Van der Woude is correct in reading these verses as an expression of hope. His assigning of these words to the opponents of Micah is connected to the discussion concept and is based on the supposition that Micah delivered only oracles of doom. The idea of a discussion with optimistic opponents can already be found with Ibn Ezra and Ewald (1867, 500–502).

Others have argued that 2:12–13 should be read as a judgment oracle (Mays 1976, 73–76; Hagstrom 1988, 51–57; Brin 1989; Sweeney 2004, 316–18). This proposal, too,

should be dismissed in view of the fact that the verbs "to gather" and "to collect" have a salvific connotation. Besides, these scholars assume a one-dimensionality to the image of God in Micah 2–5. To avoid such a one-dimensional image, R. L. Smith (1984, 28–29) proposed that 2:12–13 was spoken by Micah but at a different time and occasion than 2:6–11.

Many scholars have construed 2:12–13 as a late insertion by a redactor who, influenced by the message of Deutero-Isaiah, sought to add an element of hope to the dreary words of Micah (Wellhausen 1963, 139; Willi-Plein 1971, 79–80; Renaud 1977, 130–44; Jeremias 2007, 154–56; De Moor 2020, 14–15, 23, 153, connects this section with the return of exiles during the reign of Darius I around 520 BCE). Some see the verses as a doublet of 4:6–7 (Sellin 1922, 275). Although these views have the advantage of producing a coherent image of Micah as a prophet of doom (see the standard view on Jer 26:8), they fail to explain the observation that the passage is close in a number of respects to that of parts of the book of Micah thought by most to be "genuine." Werse (2019, 225–30) construes 2:13 to be original but sees 2:12 as part of the exilic Four Redaction II.

I prefer to read 2:12–13 as part of the second historical horizon in the futurology of Micah. After devastation and exile, a return and rebuilding will take place. The unit is written in the language of promise (see also Rudolph 1975, 62–65; Hillers 1984, 38–40; Jenson 2008, 128–29; Smith-Christopher 2015, 104–7).

Notes

2:12. *I will certainly collect you completely, Jacob, / I will certainly gather the remnant of Israel.* The paranomastic construction present here intensifies the action; I render it with the adverb "certainly" (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §35.3.1). Both verbs, "to gather" and "to collect," have a positive connotation and are used as metaphors for the return of the people of God from exile (*'āsap* || *qābaṣ*: Isa 11:12; Ezek 11:17; Mic 4:6, 12; Zeph 3:18). The "gathering" should therefore not be seen as a gathering of Judaeans before the exile (contra Brin 1989).

The 2.m.s. suffix in *kullāk,* "all of you," refers to Jacob as addressee (McKane 1998, 89). After verse 12a there is a shift of person: the objects of divine favor are addressed with third-person forms. There is no need to smooth the MT and read *kullām,* "all of them" (van der Woude 1976, 96; Kessler 1999, 136; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 337; Wagenaar 2000, 532–33; Wagenaar 2001a, 95–96; Waltke 2007, 131; Cruz 2016, 167–68), or *kullô,* "all of him" (Sellin 1922, 275; Wellhausen 1963, 139; Robinson and Horst 1964, 136; Mays 1976, 73; Hillers 1984, 38); or to construe the word adverbially, for example, *zur Gänze* (Zapff 1997, 20–21).

Both "Jacob" and "Israel" traditionally refer to the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom. In the context of the futurology in Micah 2–5, the names can be seen as references to the whole of Israel and Judah in exile.

Hasel (1974; see also Cruz 2016, 184–86) has convincingly argued that the concept of the "remnant" occurs not only in late texts. Hence, the presence of the noun *šĕ'ērît,* "remnant," cannot be used as an argument for a late date of 2:12–13.

I will set them together like sheep in the sheepfold. The noun *yaḥad,* "unity," has, in this context, an adverbial force, as in Ps 33:15. *Boṣrāh* should not be construed as a

nomen locale, as has often been done with reference to the idea that Bozrah probably was a shearing center in Edom (Renaud 1977, 131; Zapff 1997, 21–22; Kessler 1999, 136–37; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 339; Runions 2001, 142; Jenson 2008, 129; Smith-Christopher 2015, 94; Schütte 2016, 104). The Vulgate, *in ovili,* and Targum, *bgw ḥṭr',* "in the sheepfold," suggest the reading **baṣṣîrāh,* "in the fold" in the *Vorlage,* which makes sense in view of the parallelism with *dōbèr,* "pasture"; it is a noun indicating the enclosure in which sheep were gathered (Sellin 1922, 276; Robinson and Horst 1964, 136; Hillers 1984, 38; Wagenaar 2001a, 97–98; De Moor 2020, 153–54). Ben Zvi (2000, 65–66) renders with "in a fenced place"; he construes this to be a pun on the name of the Edomite stronghold. The LXX *èn thlípsei,* "in affliction, trouble," **bĕṣārāh,* corroborates the three consonants in the Hebrew text but does not represent a better understanding in context (contra Shaw 1993, 71).

They will bustle with humanity. The verb *hāmāh* indicates the presence of a loud sound. In parallel with the interpretation of *bṣrh* as a reference to the city of Bozrah, *mē'ādām* has been construed by some as referring to Edom and rendered "from Edom" (see Andersen and Freedman 2000, 340; Wagenaar 2000, 535–39; Wagenaar 2001a, 100). The line would then refer to a liberation of the Judaeans from Edom—either historically, as the end of an exile to Edom during the reign of Ahaz (cf. 2 Kgs 16:7, 2 Chr 28:17), or metaphorically, interpreting "Edom" as a *chiffre* for the "nations." This reading, however, is not corroborated by the ancient versions. The word *'ādām* is best understood as meaning "humanity" or "humankind" (Sellin 1922, 276; Rudolph 1975, 62; Renaud 1977, 32–33; *DCH* 1:123–26; Schütte 2016, 104–5). Ben Zvi (2000, 65–66) renders with "people," which he construes to be a pun on the name Edom. The preposition *min* marks the material from which the clatter originates (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §11.2.11d) and does not have a causal function (contra Allen 1976, 300; Shaw 1993, 71; Cruz 2016, 170–71; Dempster 2017, 101–2). Wagenaar (2000) incorrectly argues that the verb form *'ālāh,* "to go out," should be seen as the final word of verse 12 (see De Moor 2002a, 99).

2:13. *The one who made a breach goes up before them*. The verb *pāraṣ* signifies the making of a breach in the encirclement around a sheepfold through which the animals can escape the enclosure. The "breaker" can be identified with YHWH, who leads his sheep out of bondage (Sellin 1922, 276; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 340; Hunziker-Rodewald 2001, 73–188; Cruz 2016, 178–84). Throughout the verse, this identification is successively made clear: breaker → king → YHWH. As the verse progresses, the imagery shifts from pastoral to military: the shepherd becomes a liberating warrior. The agrarian image evokes the idea that the sheep are more than eager to leave the enclosure for the meadows (De Moor 2020, 155).

The use of the verb *'ālāh,* "to go out," might be an allusion to the exodus traditions. This verb is known in the Hebrew Bible as an element of those traditions depicting the "deliverance out of Egypt" (Groß 1974).

Their king will pass through before them. The Hebrew noun *mèlèk* can refer to an earthly king, such as David. In this context, the unnamed king is presented as either: the agent of the plan of YHWH or God himself.

namely YHWH, at their head. The *wāw copulativum* has, in the context, explicative force, identifying the "king" as YHWH.

Comments

Micah 2 does not end in doom or exile. Beyond the catastrophe, there is hope for the future. God will gather the remnant of his people and lead them out of the encampment of exile. The text does not give a hint as to the reason(s) why YHWH would eventually console Judah. A change in the divine mentality is not presupposed. On the other hand, no clues are given about a necessary change in attitude of the remnant before their salvation.

This unit continues to be a sign of hope for all those whose lives are still in "exile" and who experience their existence as a long, dark tunnel. At an unexpected moment and for no obvious reasons, the mournfulness will fade away.

Leaders Accused (3:1–4)

3 [1]And I said:
"Hear now, heads of Jacob and rulers of Israel!
Should you not know what justice is,
[2]you who hate the good and love the evil,
you who tear off the skin from them
and the flesh from their bones?"
[3]Because they ate the flesh of my people,
stripped off the skin from them
and broke their bones.
They spread it out like in a pot,
like flesh in the midst of a kettle.
[4]Then, they will cry out to YHWH,
but he will not answer them.
At that time, he will conceal his face from them
because of the evil deeds they have done.

Introduction

The first section of Micah 3, verses 1–4, contains an accusation against the ruling elite, taking up themes from the previous chapter. The section has three subsections:

1. Verses 1–2: Accusations in the "you" form
2. Verse 3: Accusations in the "they" form
3. Verse 4: Description of the futility of the elite praying to God in times of judgment

Some scholars construe the "I" in verse 1 as referring to the prophet (e.g., Mays 1976, 77–78; Ben Zvi 2000, 70–71, 74; Wagenaar 2001a, 106–7). The clause is seen as a rare element of autobiographical character (Hillers 1984, 41–43; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 349; for a survey, see Willis 1968a; Dempster 2017, 110) and sometimes

as the remainder of a longer autobiographical narrative (Sellin 1922, 276–77; Weiser 1949, 225; Shaw 1993, 97). This argument *e silentio* is not very convincing, since there are no clear indications in the text that could hint at an autobiography. The "I" is best seen as referring to God. Willis (1968a) opts for the view that with *wā'ōmar,* a new section in the book of Micah is opened: chapters 3–5.

For many scholars, the shift from 2.m.p. to 3.m.p. forms between verses 2 and 3 is an indication of redactional activity (see Renaud 1977, 156–64).

Hagstrom (1988, 29–34) proposes rearranging the order by relocating verse 3 between verses 2a and 2b–c. Some scholars (Mays 1976, 76–77; Wagenaar 2001a, 105, 241–45; Wagenaar 2001b) construe the oracle to be in disarray and propose locating verse 2b after verse 3 and including verse 5a between them. This would restore the balance between the accusations of the leaders and the announcement of judgment in 3:4. Schart (1998, 184–90) construes 3:4bα to be a later addition from the hand of the D-redaction. If the shift in pronouns between verses 2 and 3 is seen as an intentional change of address and hence a rhetorical strategy, such interventions are not necessary. The rhetorical strategy can be summarized as follows: after addressing the elite directly and personally (verses 1–2), the prophet then directs his attention to the audience as a whole to accuse the elite.

Notes

3:1. *And I said*. The LXX renders here with a 3.m.s. form: "he said." This *ad sensum* translation avoids interpretative problems. Construing the *wāw* as having adversative force, van der Woude (1969; 1976, 100–101) argues that 3:1–4 is introduced as a section in which the prophet reacts against his opponents (see also Utzschneider 1999, 128; Waltke 2007, 144–46; Gignilliat 2019, 127–28). I argue that the "I" in "I said" refers to YHWH; therefore, the section is presented as divine speech, underscoring the urgency of the message.

Hear now, heads of Jacob and rulers of Israel! The noun *rō'š,* "head (of the body)," can be used as an administrative term, referring to a person of a community or clan that bears responsibilities (see, e.g., Exod 18:25; Num 1:16; Deut 1:15; Judg 10:18; 11:8, 9, 11; Hos 2:2; see Cook 2004, 216–17; De Moor 2020, 169). The heads are addressed because of their role in the community of God's people.

A *qāṣîn,* "ruler," could be a military commander (so Smith-Christopher 2015, 107; Josh 10:24, Judg 11:11, Dan 11:18), a judge (van der Ploeg 1950, 52), or a ruler in the political sphere (Isa 1:10; 3:6, 7; 22:3; Mic 3:1, 9; Prov 6:7; Sir 48:15; Ḥorvat 'Uza Jar inscription 1.3, 2.2; see De Moor 2020, 170). The social position of a *qāṣîn* seems to fluctuate over time (Rudolph 1975, 69). In Josh 10:24, he is in a subordinate position; in the Ḥorvat 'Uza Jar inscriptions, the *qṣn* is second in rank; finally, texts from Isaiah and Micah assume a person of the highest rank.

Heads and rulers together suggest the ruling elite without mentioning names. The function of a "head" was hereditary, while a "ruler" was appointed to the position. This implies that both types of representation were present. According to traditional moral and social codes, those in charge were supposed to shield the weak (Robinson and Horst 1964, 137; Kessler 1999, 147–48; Gignilliat 2019, 129–31; De Moor 2020, 170–71). This is reflected in the plea of a harvester in the Hebrew inscription from

Yavne Yam to return to him his garment for the night. The plaintiff writes: "If the official (*śr*) does not consider it an obligation to [return your servant's garment, let them have] pity upon him" (*KAI* 200 = *CoS* 3, 41:12–14; Sasson 1984).

Should you not know what justice is. The interrogative particle *ha* in combination with the adverb of negation, *lō',* generally introduces a rhetorical question (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §40.3; Brongers 1981; Wagenaar 2001a, 107–8). If anyone knew what represents justice, it should have been the ruling elite.

Although *mišpāṭ*, "justice," often has a legal connotation in the Hebrew Bible, the noun should not be confused with narrow ideas of justice in present-day Western legal systems. In fact, the noun *mišpāṭ* denotes the whole social code that is accepted by a community and that functions as an instrument for the continuation of that community through time (Rudolph 1975, 70; Niehr 1986; Kessler 1999, 148).

3:2. *you who hate the good and love the evil*. This reproach is phrased by using two pairs of antonyms. The word *śānā',* "to hate," stands opposite to *'āhab,* "to love," as do *ṭōb,* "good," and *rā',* "evil." In a few semantically chiastic words the author sketches a world in moral chaos. The clause is a clear, paradoxical oxymoron (De Moor 2020, 171).

you who tear off the skin from them. The verb *gāzal,* "to rob, tear off," from 2:2 is repeated. The imagery, however, is amplified in a grave way (Waltke 2007, 148). The object of robbing is no longer the cloths of the impoverished but the skin of their bodies and the flesh of their bones. In ancient Near Eastern warfare, the stripping off of the skin and flesh was a means to humiliate the enemy. For instance, in his report on the conquest of the rebellious city Damdammusa, Assurnasirpal II wrote: "I felled with the sword 800 of their combat troops, I burnt 3,000 captives from them. I did not leave one of them alive as hostage. I captured alive Hulaya their city ruler. I made a pile of their corpses. I burnt their adolescent boys (and) girls. I flayed Hulaya their city ruler (and) draped his skin over the wall of the city" (Grayson 1976, II 547–550; see Cogan 1983; Dubovský 2009; cf. 2 Kgs 15:16; see also Sargon II Annals from Khorsabad 169 = *CoS* 2, 118A; Sargon II display inscription 35). In Mic 3:2, these atrocities stand metaphorically for the way the ruling elite had treated their impoverished compatriots by ransacking them economically.

Wagenaar (2001b) incorrectly construes the participles in verses 2a and 2b as 3.m.p. forms, overlooking the fact that they are referring back to the "you" in verse 1b.

3:3. *Because they ate the flesh of my people*. The particle *'ašèr* here has conjunctive force. It also accompanies the shift from appeal (vv. 1–2) to description (v. 3). This plausible function makes less likely a reconstruction of **kišĕ'ĕr,* "like flesh," on the basis of an assumed LXX reading **hoos sárkas* (Smith-Christopher 2015, 107–8). In the LXX, this word group is absent at the beginning of the verse (*pace* Sellin 1922, 276; Hagstrom 1988, 138; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 353; see also Kessler 1999, 145). It would disturb the structure of the argument to delete *'ăšèr* (contra Robinson and Horst 1964, 136; McKane 1998, 103). The word *'ammî,* "my people," indicates the object of the violations listed in this and the previous verse.

Cannibalism is a reprehensible act against humanity, reducing a fellow human to a source of protein (Bellamy 2020). Nevertheless, it has occurred throughout history and up to the present. For instance, in 1972 the plane carrying an Uruguayan rugby team crashed in the Andes, and those rescued two months later had survived by eating the flesh of their deceased teammates. However, reports from antiquity—for instance,

Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 6, 195) described the Ethiopians as *anthropofagoi*—or from Christian missionaries who portrayed members of remote cultures as "cannibals" should be taken *cum grano salis*. Most of these reports functioned to demonize the other.

In texts from the ancient Near East, the topic occurs mainly in those that describe a situation of famine due to warfare and those that contain curses should a vassal not live up to the stipulations of a treaty or a loyalty oath (see Bosman 2012). Examples of the first category can be found in the Old Babylonian Atrahasis Epic (D [i] 36–38; D [ii] 48–51):

> When the sixth year arrived,
> They prepared [the daughter] for food.
> The child they prepared for food.
> Filled were [. . .].
> One house de[voured] the other.

This cannibalism was triggered by an enduring famine caused by the gods who wanted humankind to be erased from the earth. Describing the fate of Uate', the rebellious Arab king, Ashurbanipal writes: "The rest of the Arabs who had fled before my weapons, the brave god Erra struck them down. Famine broke out among them and in their hunger, they ate the flesh of their children. The curses, as many as were written in their *adê* (binding agreement), Ashur, Sin, Shamash, Bel, Nabu, Ishtar of Nineveh, Ishtar of Arbela, the great gods, my lords, brought upon them suddenly" (Ashurbanipal Cylinder B viii 23–30). The Egyptian Pyramid texts have a section on the cannibalistic appetite of Pharaoh Unas should a subject be disobedient:

> For Pharaoh is the great power that overpowers the powers.
> Pharaoh is a sacred image, the most sacred image
> of the sacred images of the great one.
> Whom he finds in his way, him he devours bit by bit.
> (Cannibal Hymn, Pyramid Text 407a–c; see also Coffin Texts Spell 573)

Interesting is an aside in one of the letters from the ka-servant Heqanakhte (Egypt; twentieth century BCE). In a report on severe hunger in Upper Egypt, he states, "They have started to eat people here!" (Heqanakhte Letter II 27–28; James 1962, 31–45; *CoS* 3.1B). In the Hebrew Bible, comparable scenes are present in 2 Kgs 6:24–7:20; Isa 9:19–20; Jer 19:9; and Lam 2:20, 4:10, as well as in Bar 2:2–3.

A report in the Annals of Ashurbanipal clearly mirrors the kind of curse found in the loyalty oaths of Esarhaddon. A severe famine leading to cannibalism will be the result of disloyalty: "Just as this ewe is cut open and the flesh of its young is placed in its mouth, so may they make you eat in your hunger the flesh of your brothers, your sons, and your daughters" (SAA 2.6 547–50; *CoS* 4.38). A similar curse can be found in the Hebrew Bible (Lev 26:27–29, Deut 28:53–57). All of these texts see the eating of the flesh of one's children as an emergency measure in times of harsh famine. The lack of food is seen as the result of divine punishment.

All of these texts supply a context for the words of Mic 3:3. The prophet evokes a dire situation of sorrow and famine. It should be noted, however, that the author gives a specific twist to the imagery. In all of the texts mentioned above, people are presented who, because of circumstances, are forced to eat the flesh of their own children. In

contrast, Micah reproaches the elite of Jerusalem for having eaten the flesh of God's people—not of their own family members—exacerbating the transgression. The line should be read metaphorically. Based on the wartime image of cannibalism, the elite are accused of the economic emaciation of the defenseless poor (Lemos 2006).

stripped off the skin from them. This phrase takes up the accusation in 2:8 where the verb *pāšaṭ* is also used. The reproach here, however, is more profound. The elite are no longer accused of merely stripping off the clothes of the poor; rather, they are accused of the much graver trespass of removing their skin.

and broke their bones. The verb used, *pāṣaḥ,* is not the common Hebrew word for "to break" (*šābar*). In Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 44:23, 49:13, 52:9, 54:1, 55:12) and Ps 98:4, the *qal* form of *pāṣaḥ* refers to acts of "crushing" a wall in order to break through to freedom. Micah 3:3 is the only instance where the verb is used in the Pi. with the connotation of intensified crushing not leading to freedom but indicating the horrible end of the lives of the impoverished. Again, the phrase should be taken metaphorically: the elite have broken the economic and social lives of the impoverished.

They spread it out like in a pot. The verb *pāraś* generally means "to spread out." The image evoked is that of a careful distribution of bones and meat in order to cook them in a pot. Metaphorically, this means that the elite were willingly making a meal of the weak, that is, they enriched themselves with the (former) property of the impoverished.

The noun *sîr* refers to a cooking pot. In the Hebrew Bible, all sorts of meals are prepared in such a pot (Exod 16:3, 2 Kgs 4, Job 41:23), including sacrificed meat (Zech 14:20, 21; 2 Chr 35:13).

The meaning of the noun *bāśār* differs from that of the noun *še'ēr,* "flesh," used earlier in 3:3. Although the semantic fields of both words do not completely overlap—*še'ēr* sometimes means "meat"; *bāśār* often refers to a living animal or human—they are synonymous in this verse.

A *qallaḥat,* "kettle, caldron," is a cooking implement, most probably an Egyptian loanword: *qrḥ.t*, "vessel" (De Moor 2011; Noonan 2019, 192–93; De Moor 2020, 173–74). The noun is also attested in an Ugaritic scribal exercise (*qlḥt; KTU* 5.22: 16). The noun occurs only twice in the Hebrew Bible (1 Sam 2:14, Mic 3:3). In both instances, meat is prepared in a *qallaḥat*. The word is a synonym of *sîr,* "pot." Rollston (2013) has argued that the inscription on a pithos found in Jerusalem (Mazar, Ben-Shlomo, and Aḥituv 2013) should be read as *qlḥ,* "cauldron," implying that the potsherd is to be seen as the remains of a cauldron.

3:4. *Then, they will cry out . . .* This verse has the form of a futility curse (see Hillers 1964, 28–29; Quick 2018, 107, 122). These curses depict a chaotic or desolate future (P. A. Krüger 2012). Expectedly, praying would lead to a divine answer. A futility clause is a form of speech that indicates that human actions will not yield the expected result. Such a clause indicates that divine punishment will break the expected chain of cause and consequence. The language of the futility clause has deep roots in the ancient Near East (Quick 2018). I understand a futility clause to be a sentence that contains a futility curse. A comparable curse is present elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible: "Although they cry out to me, I will not listen to them" (Jer 11:11), and "So, when they called, I would not listen" (Zech 7:13). This futility curse in Mic 3:4 has no parallels in ancient Near Eastern texts.

Then, they will cry out to YHWH. The adverbial particle *'āz,* "then," refers to a point in time when the reproaches will turn into a judgment (Willi-Plein 1971, 81; Wagenaar 2001a, 112). In the Introduction, I argued that Micah 2–5 contains two different temporal horizons: there will be a judgment, but salvation awaits the pious. Here, the word *'āz,* "then," refers to the first temporal horizon.

The 3.m.p. *yiz'aqû* refers to the people accused in the previous verse. The verb *zā'aq,* "to cry out," denotes the often desperate loudness of a prayer in times of trouble (Boyce 1988). Shouting out loud seems to be the only option left for the leading elite of Jerusalem in their hour of judgment.

but he will not answer them. Despite the crying out of the elite when realizing what they had done when being confronted with forthcoming doom, God will be silent. The Hebrew Bible provides examples where God does not answer a prayer because of offenses and trespasses (e.g., Deut 1:45, 1 Sam 9:18, Job 35:12; the theme also occurs in ancient Near Eastern texts; see Korpel and De Moor 2011, 192–93, 238–44).

At that time, he will conceal his face from them. The adverbial adjunct *bā'ēt hahî',* "at that time," just like its parallel *'āz,* "then," refers to the first temporal horizon. The Hi. of the verb *sātar,* "to hide, conceal," with *pānîm,* "face," as object occurs several times in the Hebrew Bible with the connotation "to withdraw (his) favor" (Deut 31:17, 32:20; Isa 8:17, 54:8, 64:6; Jer 33:5; Ezek 39:23, 24, 29; Mic 3:4; Pss 13:2, 22:25, 27:9, 69:18, 88:15, 102:3, 143:7). In all of these instances, God conceals his face as a reaction to human trespasses. This divine inaccessibility stands parallel to God's silence. Both are reactions to humans concealing themselves before God's moral impetus (Wagenaar 2001a, 112–13; S. Noll 2019, 117–32; Gignilliat 2019, 132–33).

because of the evil deeds they have done. Human transgressions, listed in 3:1–3, are assessed and summarized as *rā'ah,* "evil," that is, acts that oppose the religious and social code of ancient Israel.

Comments

Once again, the ruling elite are reproached for their lack of empathy for their impoverished compatriots. In graphic language, their economic bloodsucking is displayed and condemned (Hillers 1984, 41–43; Jeremias 2007, 159–61; Arena 2020, 158–59). Through their actions, they not only violated the social and moral codes of tribal Israel, but they also effectively blocked their connection to the divine. The author does not pay attention to the economic structures and political powers behind the impoverishment (as noted by O'Brien 2015, 35), as a modern-day sociologist would. Whether or not military oppression is also criticized is difficult to determine (thus Smith-Christopher 2015, 107–13). The author introduces a moral judgment. As a result, YHWH will be unresponsive to the elite's cry for help in times of judgment.

The ransacking of the poor by the ruling elite is unfortunately a perennial practice of humankind—with some exceptions.

Prophets Accused (3:5–8)

3

[5]Thus says YHWH concerning the prophets
who cause my people to do wrong,
who, when their teeth have something to bite
proclaim "Peace!,"
but against the one who does not give them anything in their mouth
they consecrate a war.
[6]It will be night for you, however, without vision
and there will be darkness over you, without divination.
The sun will go down over the prophets
and the day will grow dark over them.
[7]The seers will be ashamed
and the diviners confounded.
They will all wrap themselves up to the moustache
since no answer will come from God.
[8]On the other hand, I am full of power
and the spirit of YHWH, of judgment and strength
to give notice to Jacob of his transgression
and to Israel of its sin.

Introduction

Micah 3:5–8 consists of three parts (see Hagstrom 1988, 34–36). First, verse 5 contains an indictment against those religious specialists who provide a message of peace in return for a piece of bread (Rudolph 1975, 71–73). Second, verses 6–7 describe their punishment: it will no longer be possible for them to contact the divine realm; God will be silent toward them (Korpel and De Moor 2011, 192–93). And third, the final verse, verse 8, pictures, in clear contrast, the role and position of the "I" character. To him God will not be silent.

The section is well composed. The Masoretic tradition has put boundary markers before and after the section. In view of the conceptual coherence, there are no compelling reasons to see elements of the section as later redactional additions (contra Wagenaar 2001a, 245–47; Arena 2020, 163–66, 172–74).

Notes

3:5. *Thus says YHWH concerning the prophets*. The section starts with the well-known *Botenformel,* or messenger formula, by which the author casts himself in the role of a messenger delivering a divine communication (A. Wagner 2004). In contrast to the previous chapters, the "preachers" are now referred to as *nĕbî'îm,* the generic Hebrew word for those religious specialists who claim, either correctly or incorrectly, to be messengers of YHWH. The context makes clear that in 3:5, prophets with a misleading message are meant. They are "trading Yahweh's word for a price" (Boloje 2018, 640–44).

who cause my people to do wrong. The verb *tā'āh,* "to err, do wrong," is used in the Hi. to denote actions of leaders who "mislead" the people mentally and morally, for whom they are responsible (2 Kgs 21:9 = 2 Chr 33:9; Isa 3:12, 9:15; Hos 4:12; Amos 2:4; Mic 3:5; Jenson 2008, 134; Boloje 2018, 642). The prophet Jeremiah accuses the prophets of Samaria of misleading the population (Jer 23:13, 32). The misleading character of the prophets in Micah is outlined in the remainder of this verse.

who, when their teeth have something to bite. A *šēn,* "ivory, tooth," is conceived as one of the participants in the digestive process. The verb *nāšak,* "to bite," is an uncommon word for the act of eating (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 362–63) but is not uncommonly used of snakes (Gen 49:17; Num 21:6–9; Jer 8:17; Amos 5:19; Qoh 10:8, 11). The use of this verb here associates harm with the acts of the prophets. They are portrayed as people longing for luxury and, in return for such luxury, willing to prophesy favorably to those who satisfy their greed.

proclaim "Peace!" The verb *qārā',* "to call, speak, announce, declare," has a broad range of meaning (Boyce 1988). In some contexts, the specific meaning of the verb is "to foretell future events" (1 Kgs 13:4, 32; 2 Kgs 23:16, 17). In Mic 3:5, the meaning comes close to "to make a prophetic announcement."

It is impossible to render the Hebrew concept *šālôm* with one English word. The Hebrew word refers to a benign situation in which warfare and quarrel are absent and people live in harmony, security, and prosperity (Brueggemann 2001; Yoder 2017; Boloje 2018, 642; van der Walt 2021). On some occasions, prophets could announce peace (e.g., Nah 2:1). In the dire times of Micah, however, announcing peace was a misleading message.

but against the one who does not give them anything in their mouth. The *wāw copulativum* has adversative force. The final lines of verse 5 picture the inverse of the middle two lines. Where those who please the prophets with plenty of food are promised peace, those who do not feed them can count on a negative message. It is tempting to connect this latter group with the impoverished people, but such a claim has no grounding in the text. Steiner (2015, 26) assumes that a fee for military help is implied.

The act of nongiving is phrased in much more sober language than is the act of giving. The noun *pî,* "mouth," stands in antithetic parallelism to *šēn,* "tooth."

they consecrate a war. The Pi. of the verb *qādaš* has in this context the function of sanctifying or consecrating a war (Hagstrom 1988, 138; Wagenaar 2001a, 115; Smith-Christopher 2015, 114–16; De Moor 2020, 177). The words are indirectly borrowed from the language of the "holy war" in ancient Israel, as can be found in the books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel. A not unimportant shift has taken place, however. Whereas the wars of YHWH are presented as divine acts implemented by God in favor of his people, the "misleading war" of Mic 3:5 has no divine inspiration.

The word *milḥāmāh,* referring to a war leading to devastation, is the antithesis of the noun *šālôm,* "peace," earlier in the verse. Such a war would not be in favor of God's people; it would be directed against Israel.

3:6. *It will be night for you, however, without vision*. The theme of prophetic silence suggests the extreme bitterness of Judah's fate. In days to come, YHWH will abandon his people, and the traditional channels for communication—divination and prophecy—will be closed. In the coming darkness, YHWH will be out of reach, and the people of Judah will be left on their own. This theme is also present in a lengthy letter written in Neo-Assyrian by Urad-Gula to the king. Urad-Gula had been an exorcist in the service of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. He was a member of a prominent Assyrian scribal family—the son of Esarhaddon's chief exorcist, Adad-šumu-uṣur, and the nephew of Esarhaddon's master scholar, Nabu-zeru-lešir. Yet the life of Urad-Gula had taken a turn for the worse; he is now impoverished, he has lost his position, and his wife is severely ill. He feels his life is as in the lion's den. He turns to the king for help in his old age in a complaint drenched in melancholic language:

> [The king] is not pleased with me; I go to the palace, I am no good;
> [I turned to] a prophet (but)
> did not find [any hop]e, he was adverse and did not see much.
> [O king] my [lord], seeing you is
> happiness, your attention is fortune.
>
> (SAA 10.294: r. 30–33)

The absence of a vision deprives the exorcist of his last hope.

The word *lākēn,* "however" here, does not have its standard resultative function in this verse (as, for instance, proposed by Jenson 2008, 136). In my view the element *lĕ* is to be construed as the emphatic *le* II. This implies that in 3:6, *lākēn* does not have a causal but an adversative function (March 1974; Jongeling 1981; Wagenaar 2001a, 73; see also 1 Sam 28:2; Jer 2:33, 30:16; Mic 3:6; Aramaic, *TADEA* A4, 2:8).

Andersen and Freedman (2000, 373–74) correctly argue that the four clauses in verse 6 paint the image of sunset in daytime. I disagree with them on their view that the verse refers to a solar eclipse of apocalyptic dimensions. In my view this verse and the following one should be read metaphorically and in contrast with verse 8: where the channels to the divine are closed for this kind of prophet, they will be fully open for the prophet behind the "I" character (Korpel and De Moor 2011, 192–93; Boloje 2018, 643).

The preposition *min* in *mēḥāzôn,* "without vision," is a privative marker; that is, it marks what is missing or unavailable (Robinson and Horst 1964, 136; Dahood 1978, 182; Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §11.2.11.e; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 373; Wagenaar 2001a, 116). The word *ḥāzôn,* "vision," is a traditional Hebrew word for the

visionary reception of a prophecy. The noun is used both for "real visions" (e.g., Nah 1:1) and for "visions of their own imagination" (Jer 23:16). Visions are generally connected with the night and with dreaming. The prophet Ezekiel took up imagery from Micah. In the darkness of the Babylonian exile, he states, "For there will no longer be any false vision or deceptive divination within the house of Israel" (Ezek 12:24, NASB).

and there will be darkness over you, without divination. The darkness expresses the same idea as the night in verse 6a. With the LXX *skotia*, "darkness, gloom," the word *ḥāškāh* should be construed as a noun, *ḥāšēkāh* (see, e.g., Allen 1976, 310; Hillers 1984, 44; Shaw 1993, 98; Wagenaar 2001a, 116; Hibbard 2018, 27). This view has been unconvincingly challenged (by Utzschneider 1999, 139; and Arena 2020, 161).

The preposition *min* in *miqqĕsōm,* "without vision," is again a privative marker indicating what is missing or unavailable (for instance, Renaud 1977, 167–68). Other scholars prefer a more literal translation: "from divination" (Hillers 1984, 44; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 358; Arena 2020, 161). The infinitive construct *qĕsom,* "to divine," functions as the noun "divination" (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 374). In the Hebrew Bible, both the noun *qèsèm,* "divination," and the verb *qāsam,* "to practice divination," are used in a pejorative sense indicating an unacceptable way of consulting the divine (e.g., 1 Sam 28:8, 2 Kgs 17:17, Ezek 13, Jer 27, Mic 3).

The sun will go down over the prophets. Even if one takes this expression literally—"the end of the day"—it still has a metaphorical undertone. Parallel to the previous lines, "sunset" stands for the end of the possibility of communicating with the divine. A time will come when the prophetic queries will no longer be answered; it will be as if they were sent into a black hole.

The author again uses the noun *nĕbî'îm,* the generic Hebrew word for those religious specialists who claim, either correctly or incorrectly, to be messengers of YHWH. From the context and the contrast with verse 8, it becomes clear that the claims of the prophets in verse 6 fail to be substantiated. I see no evidence to construe the prophets as "cultic prophets" (e.g., van der Woude 1976, 106–17) since the context is void of cultic language and imagery. In my view, they were religious specialists who offered their services to the ruling elite and had a firm belief in the inviolability of Jerusalem.

and the day will grow dark over them. The noun *yôm,* "day," is a poetic parallel to *šèmèš,* "sun." In this context, the word denotes the period of daylight. An eschatological undertone, as in Joel 2:10 and 4:15, seems to be absent, since the word continues the imagery of the previous lines (*pace* Andersen and Freedman 2000, 374).

The verb *qādar,* "to be(come) dark," expresses a change parallel to the sunset. The imagery is the same as in the previous line: the prophets will be disconnected and no longer enlightened. The image might have been derived from the experience of a solar eclipse, which was seen as a bad omen in the ancient Near East (De Moor 2020, 178). In the epilogue to the Old Babylonian Codex Hammurabi, the trespasser of the rules given is threatened with a series of curses. One of them reads: "May Za-má-má, the great warrior, the chief son of E-kur, who goes at my right hand, shatter his weapons on the field of battle! May he turn day into night for him, and place his enemy over him!" (CH 43: 81–88; *CoS* 2.131).

3:7. *The seers will be ashamed*. A *ḥōzeh,* "visionary seer," was traditionally a religious specialist in ancient Israel who was consulted by the powerful in order to know what the future had in store. Originally, the noun was a synonym for *nābî',* "prophet" (1 Sam

9:9–19) and not taken as a dismissive term. Various prophets, like Micah (1:1), are said to have received a "vision." Only in a few contexts does the noun denote a "false prophet" (2 Kgs 17:13, Mic 3:7).

The verb *bôš,* "to be ashamed," should be read in its ancient Near Eastern context, apart from modern ideas of shame and honor. With Stiebert (2002), "shame" should be construed as part of the culture's "anti-language," which describes what is undesirable in a given culture. In Micah 3, "shame" should not be connected to anything sexual. The word indicates the humiliation of a certain group of people as a result of their conduct.

and the diviners confounded. On the noun *qosēm,* "diviner," see Notes at 3:6. The verb *ḥāpar,* "to be ashamed, confounded," expresses a humiliation comparable to that of the verb *bôš* (see the above Note). In sum, the seers and the diviners will stand empty-handed and aside as a result of their attempts to lead the people astray.

They will all wrap themselves up to the moustache. The verb *ʿāṭāh,* "to wrap," refers to the act of enveloping oneself with cloth in order to be unrecognizable. In 1 Sam 28:14, Samuel is depicted as having wrapped himself in a robe but nevertheless was recognized by Saul. Jeremiah 43:12 applies the image of a shepherd wrapping himself in an insecure garment as a metaphor for the supposed security of the Judaean refugees in Egypt.

In the ancient Near East a *śāpām,* "moustache," was an identity marker referring to the masculinity of its bearer (Gressmann 1920). Covering the moustache as an act of humiliation is a component of mourning rites according to some texts (2 Sam 19:25; Ezek 24:17, 22; see Wellhausen 1963, 141; Runions 2001, 149; Olyan 2004, 30–31, 104; Jenson 2008, 136–37; De Moor 2020, 179). It marks the negation of personal identity. In Lev 13:45, the leper is summoned to cover his moustache and call out loud "unclean, unclean." The wrapping up to the moustache in Mic 3:7 should be construed as an act expressing the shame of the "other" prophets. In doing so, they enact a mourning rite signaling calamity (Olyan 2004, 104).

since no answer will come from God. In the Hebrew Bible, *maʿănèh,* "answer, response," is attested in the dialogical part of wisdom literature. It concerns the answer to important questions that are given by teachers or God (Prov 15:1, 16:1, 29:19; Job 32:3, 5). Diviners in all ages have deployed their techniques and skills to seek an answer from the divine. Such an answer will no longer be found by them (S. Noll 2019, 117–32).

Although it is tempting to read *ʾĕlōhîm* here as "spirits of the dead" (Robinson and Horst 1964, 136) in line with the divinatory context, a rendition with "God" is preferred since YHWH is construed by the author as the true source of all answers (Tropper 1989, 220).

3:8. *On the other hand, I am full of power*. The adversative adverb *ʾûlām,* "but, however," stresses the antitheses between the various religious specialists and the "I" character (Waltke 2007, 165–66; De Moor 2020, 180).

The use of the first-person pronoun *ʾănôkî,* "I," guides the attention of the reader to the "I" character, who is not cut off from the divine realm and who apparently will deliver a trustworthy message from God (Korpel and De Moor 2011, 193).

The way the prophet is filled with *kōaḥ,* "power," is not unlike the way a jar can be filled with commodities. The Hebrew noun can refer to both physical power and political power. In this verse, it indicates the mental enlightenment of the prophet who presents himself as gifted with divine attributes.

and the spirit of YHWH, of judgment and strength. As in 2:7 the *rûaḥ,* "spirit," should not be conceptualized in the framework of an anachronistic Platonic dualism or a Christian Trinitarian view (Gericke 2017). The prophet sees himself empowered with divine goodness and sympathy (Ben Zvi 2000, 72; Waltke 2007, 166). Since the words "spirit of YHWH" fit the context of Micah 3, there are no compelling reasons to construe them as a later addition on the basis of Isa 11:2 (with Hillers 1984, 45; R. L. Smith 1984, 32; Schart 1998, 184–85). Some scholars assign them to the D-redaction (Utzschneider 1999, 139; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 377; Hibbard 2018, 30–31; Arena 2020, 161; Smith-Christopher 2015, 113–14).

The noun *mišpāṭ,* "justice, judgment, lawsuit," denotes in this context the ability to tell right from wrong. The "I" character presents himself as someone—empowered by divine power and spirit—who is in a position to separate conduct that is according to the moral code of ancient Israel from conduct that is immoral (see Niehr 1986). The "I" character also presents himself as someone who is full of *gĕbûrāh,* "strength, inner power." This is not meant as a Goliath- or Samson-like power but as a charismatic gift of strong inner stamina. The whole image in 3:8 runs parallel to the description of the "shoot from the stem of Jesse" (Isa 11:2).

to give notice to Jacob of his transgression / and to Israel of its sin. The moral empowerment of the "I" character is not random but has a clear target. As in Jer 50:28 and Isa 58:1, the verb *nāgad,* Hi., means "to proclaim (on behalf of God)." He is ready and prepared to make known the ordeal of God.

This prophecy of doom stands opposite to the peaceful announcements of the "other prophets." However, it does not run parallel to the war announcement in 3:5. That prophecy was an answer to the nonfeeding of the prophets. The declaration of the "I" character is based on an analysis of the conduct of God's people in light of the given moral code.

Comments

Micah 3:5–8 pictures two contrasting concepts of prophecy. On the one side stand those prophets who act and react on the basis of human direction. When given bread to eat, they prophesy favorably; when not, they herald hopeless doom (Coomber 2021, 210–11). On the other side stands the "I" character, referring to Micah, who is inspired by God (Robinson and Horst 1964, 137–38). Within the dire social and economic circumstances that are in the background of Micah 2–5, the first approach will be cut short: it will bump against a wall of divine silence. The second approach is based on the acceptance of the failure of the elite to lead the people according to the divine command (Jeremias 2007, 161–64).

Consequences (3:9–12)

3

[9]Hear this now,
heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel,
who abhor justice
and twist everything that is straight,
[10]who build Zion with blood
and Jerusalem with injustice.
[11]Her heads judge for a bribe.
Her priests instruct for a price.
Her prophets divine for silver.
Nevertheless, they lean on YHWH, saying:
"Is YHWH not in our midst?
Evil will not come upon us!"
[12]Therefore, on your account,
Zion will be plowed into a field.
Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins.
The mountain of the house will become high places with forest.

Introduction

Micah 3:9–12 continues and combines with the two previous units. In it, both the ruling elite and the religious specialists are reproached for their illicit conduct. In verse 10, the author apparently quotes an ancient hymn that is also reflected in Hab 2:12: "Woe to him who builds a city on bloodshed / and who establishes a town by injustice!" In this way the author applies an otherwise lost anthem to the situation of his time. This proposal also implies that Mic 3:10 should not be construed as a later addition connecting Micah 3 to Habakkuk 2. De Moor (2020, 182) assumes that the book of Habakkuk is quoting the text from Mic 3:10.

The section culminates in a prophecy of doom for Zion and Jerusalem, which will be destroyed by an unknown enemy (3:12). It is this verse that is said to have saved the life of the prophet Jeremiah. When he was accused of being too negative a prophet, some of the leaders proclaimed that Micah had been a prophet of doom too and was not killed by Hezekiah, the king of Judah (Jer 26:18–19). In their quotation of Mic 3:12, the friends of Jeremiah place the prophecy of doom in the reign of Hezekiah. This has led to a discussion on the exact date and circumstances in which Micah would have given this prophecy. Taking the campaign of Sennacherib against Hezekiah in 701 BCE as a context is certainly a possibility (see Andersen and Freedman 2000, 386–87). That campaign, however, was not the only moment of threat to the independence of Jerusalem.

Notes

3:9. *Hear this now, / heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel*. The summons to hear repeats almost verbatim 3:1 (see Notes at 3:1).

who abhor justice. The form *hamata'abîm,* is a Pi. participle from the denominative verb *tā'ab,* "to abhor, hate," connected to the noun *tô'ēbāh,* "abomination" (Kessler 1999, 162–63). The verb refers to a fierce emotional disapproval, parallel to the way God and the prophets detest the cultic and moral behavior of Israel and Judah (Waltke 2007, 176–77).

As in 3:1, the noun *mišpāṭ,* "justice," denotes the social code that is accepted by a community and that functions as an instrument for the continuation of that community through time (Niehr 1986). By abhorring this code, the leaders fail to act as necessary.

and twist everything that is straight. The verb *'āqaš* has in the Pi. the meaning "to twist, make crooked." The accusation is that the leaders have distorted all things *yāšar,* "right." The parallelism with *mišpāṭ,* "justice," indicates that this geometric concept refers to moral conduct. Instead of following God's instructions for a good life, the leaders have massaged the moral code to their own benefit and in their own interest.

3:10. *who build Zion with blood / and Jerusalem with injustice*. The capital of the kingdom of Judah is indicated with two synonymous words. The author follows here the traditional order in the parallelism *ṣiyyôn . . . yĕrûšālaim* (see Andersen and Freedman 2000, 383). It might seem strange that the author switches from names for the Northern Kingdom of Israel (3:9) to indicators for the capital of Judah. Instead of accepting a redactional intervention here, I opt for the view that earlier in Micah 3, "Jacob" and "Israel" were generic terms for the whole of the people of God that might be understood as only referring to the ten northern tribes. It is part and parcel of the rhetorical strategy of the author of Micah 2–5 to switch to the real addressees of his prophecies of doom at important points.

The participle *bōneh,* "building, who build," is grammatically singular. The LXX and Vulgate render with plural forms. There is no need to change the MT (as has been suggested by Sellin 1922, 279; Robinson and Horst 1964, 138; Hillers 1984, 47; Hagstrom 1988, 36–37, 139; McKane 1998, 112), since the singular form can have a collective meaning (Willi-Plein 1971, 81). There is also no need to think here of criticism of

the king as a builder (Bergren 1974, 57; Kessler 1999, 163–65; Waltke 2007, 178; Hagedorn 2012, 160; De Moor 2020, 181–83). Texts like Josh 6:26 and 1 Kgs 16:34 suggest that children were sacrificed when a city was founded. Micah 3:10, however, does not relate to the foundation of Zion // Jerusalem (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 382–83; Wagenaar 2001a, 121–22) but to the continuous trespassing of the moral code that leads to poverty and loss of lives. Hence, it is less plausible to think about child sacrifice in this connection (the theme of child sacrifice is discussed in the Notes at Mic 6:7).

According to van der Woude (1976, 120), the verse in Micah is influenced by Hab 2:12. In his view the original reading in Micah was **bānāh,* "she is proficient (in)," a 3.f.s. form of the verb *bîn,* "to understand, be intelligent." His view solves the contradiction with the feminine form in the next verse but fails to persuade. The ancient versions do not give evidence for this form, and the construction *byn* + *b* does not occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. In my view, a different road must be taken. Micah 3 is neither quoting Habakkuk 2 nor the other way around, but both texts take up a traditional hymn in which the form *bōneh* was present.

As already remarked, the same idiom, "to build with blood," is attested in Hab 2:12. There, as well as in Mic 3:10, the phrase "to build with blood" indicates a criticism: the splendor of a beautiful city is not without its price since the hard work and bloodshed of the poor made it possible (see also Jer 22:13). "Blood" is written in the plural (*dāmîm*), indicating that the lives of more than one person suffered from the building of the city. The text probably refers to the ghastly side of Hezekiah's building program.

At various points, the noun *'awlāh* refers to "a violent deed of injustice" (see 2 Sam 3:34, 7:10 = 1 Chr 17:9; Pss 37:1, 43:1, 58:3, 89:23; Isa 61:8; Hos 10:9; Mic 3:10; Hab 2:12; Zeph 3:5, 3:13; Job 36:23). In the context of Micah 2–5, *'awlāh* describes the acts of the elite enriching themselves at the expense of the socially weak. Their city is mainly an outward façade veiling a compromised community.

3:11. *Her heads judge for a bribe*. For "heads," see Notes at 3:1. The 3.f.s. suffix seems to take Zion // Jerusalem as a female figure; however, cities generally are grammatically feminine in the Hebrew Bible. Besides, grammatical genus and biological sexus should not be blurred.

A *šōḥad,* "bribe," is a perennial lure for human beings, tempting them to interfere with the cause of justice and a just politics and economy. The regulations on justice and mercy in the Book of the Covenant stipulate the following: "You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just" (Exod 23:8; see also 16:19). First Samuel 8:3 speaks in a deprecating way of the sons of Samuel, "who took bribes and perverted justice." In situations of bribery, it is always the weak and never the wealthy who must suffer from the effects of corruption (Boloje 2018, 644–45).

Her priests instruct for a price. Next to their duties in the cultic realm, priests had the duty to help people with the problems of daily life (Deut 17:10, 11). With Clines (*DCH* 4:291–92), I construe the form *yôrû* as derived from the verb *yārāh* III, "to teach." The verb, however, does not so much refer to a classroom situation and the transfer of cognitive knowledge as to the practice of solving problems in daily life on the basis of the moral code of the community applied to new circumstances.

Since their income derived from their temple service, priests were supposed to give these instructions for free. The noun *mĕḥîr,* "price, wages," is used in the Hebrew Bible

in the context of economic exchange. David bought the threshing floor of Arauna for a full price (2 Sam 24:24). After the conquest of the city of Jerusalem the remaining population laments that they have to pay a price for their wood (Lam 5:4), which probably was free before. The Hebrew noun is a cognate of Akkadian *maḫīru,* "marketplace, commercial activity, purchase price" (*CAD* M/1, 92–96). This connection suggests that the priests of Jerusalem had transformed their traditional noncultic duties into a source of cash. There is no compelling reason to treat this line as a gloss (contra Hagedorn 2012, 161). Priests giving instruction for money form a clear parallel to bribing leaders in the previous clause.

Her prophets divine for silver. On "prophets," see Notes at 3:5. On the verb *qāsam,* "to practice divination," see Notes at 3:6. The use of the noun *kèsèp,* "silver, money," makes clear that the "prophets," just like the priests, made a market commodity of their services. This runs against the idea that prophecies should be free to all and is an indication that these prophets would serve only those able to pay them.

Nevertheless, they lean on YHWH, saying. The *wāw consecutivum* has contrasting force in this connection. The Ni. of the verb *šā'an* denotes the act of "seeking support." This "leaning" can be literal as well as figurative. In Judg 16:26, Samson wants to lean against the pillars of the Philistine temple. Isaiah 10:20 sketches a future in which the remnant of Israel will rely on only YHWH. The Book of the Wars of the Lord poetically states that the slopes of the wadis of Arnon "lean against Moab" (Num 21:14–15). Micah 3:11 describes an unjust trust and a malicious confidence in the support of YHWH. By their acts, the elite of Jerusalem have forfeited God's guidance.

Is YHWH not in our midst? As in 3:1, the interrogative particle *ha* in combination with the adverb of negation, *lō',* introduces a rhetorical question (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §40.3; Brongers 1981; Wagenaar 2001a, 123). The author provides the ruling elite with words to express their feeling of security. The rhetorical question can have two answers. The heads, prophets, and priests would answer in the affirmative. It is their conviction that Zion is inviolable, thanks to the guiding presence of YHWH. This Zion theology is clearly present in some psalms (Pss 46, 48, 76). It expresses the idea of Judah's unconquerability when the nations attack Jerusalem (*Völkerkampf*). The theology is based on the idea that divine election will keep Israel safe from its enemies in its darkest hour (see, e.g., Hayes 1963; Stolz 1970; Laato 2018). The "I" character, however, would answer the rhetorical question in a negative way. Election does not provide an enduring state of inviolability. It can be forfeited by evil acts.

Evil will not come upon us! This clause expresses the ideology of the leaders. The *rā'āh,* "evil," stands for the military devastation of Zion.

3:12. *Therefore*. The adverb *lākēn* has its traditional function of introducing an announcement of a judgment (see Notes at 2:5).

on your account. The word *biglalkèm* is a compound preposition with a 2.m.p. suffix. As elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, the word pinpoints the reason for a forthcoming action. In Gen 39:5, for instance, the house of Potiphar is blessed by God "on account of Joseph," the acts of the Hebrew refugee being the reason for the divine blessing. In Mic 3:12, the conduct of the leading elite in and around Jerusalem will be the grounds for God's judgment.

will be plowed. The Ni. of the verb *ḥāraš* indicates the act of being plowed. In most contexts in the Hebrew Bible, plowing is a preparation before sowing aimed at a harvest

that could feed the population (Hopkins 1985, 213–32). As a result of the forthcoming judgment, the area on which Zion was built will receive a change in allocation: the city area will turn into its more original use as agricultural land (Hopkins 1985, 118). In other words, divine judgment for some turns into grace for others: the village farmers can use the area for their own well-being. Reading here an aggressive sexual connotation—plowing as a metaphor for rape—is not impossible, but the agrarian language is more dominant. The proposed parallel, "My vulva is a well-watered field— / Who will plow it?" (Frymer-Kensky 1992, 52–53; Runions 2001, 150), is not attested in the indicated text. The theme of Dumuzi plowing the vulva of Inanna, however, is omnipresent in all parts of the love lyrics of Ishtar and Dumuzi. In these texts, the vulva is mentioned *expressis verbi* while the plowing is the great desire of Inanna—two elements that are absent in Mic 3:12.

into a field. With van der Woude (1976, 121–22), I construe *śādèh,* "field," to be the second object of the verb *ḥāraš,* indicating the result of the forthcoming act of plowing (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §10.2.3).

a heap of ruins. The noun *ʿî,* "ruin," is written in an exceptional plural: *ʿiyyîn*. The standard Hebrew plural, *ʿiyyîm,* is attested in the quotation of Mic 3:12 in Jer 26:18 as well as in Ps 79:1. A plural ending in *-n* is known from Moabite and Aramaic. Around 700 BCE, there was not much Aramaic influence on the Hebrew language; hence, an Aramaism is not very plausible (with Wagenaar 2001a, 124; contra McKane 1998, 113–14; Jeremias 2007, 157). Influence from Moabite cannot be excluded nor the remainder of an archaic or local form (M. Wagner 1966, 134–35; Hillers 1984, 47; Shaw 1993, 99). Van der Woude's (1976, 130) proposal to construe *ʿiyyîn* as a *pluralis intensivus* is compelling. On the rendition with *opôrofulakion,* "hut for a garden watcher," in the LXX, see Notes at Mic 1:6. The plural might have been chosen to rhyme with the noun "Zion."

Of greater importance is the image depicted. The authors take up the imagery of destruction from Mic 1:6 (see Notes there). The same idea is present in Ps 79:1, which opens with the complaint that the nations have laid "Jerusalem in ruins." Turning a city into a ruin resting in a desolate field is a standard topos in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions describing the fate of a city that had rebelled and was conquered by the king (see Notes at Mic 1:6; this is overlooked by Stovell 2015). An Aramaic treaty curse contains parallel wording:

> May his kingdom turn into a kingdom of sand
> . . .
> May his meadows be destroyed unto wasteland
> And may Arpad become a heap of ruins.
>
> (*KAI* 222 A:32–33; see Hillers 1964, 44–54; 1984, 48)

A parallel curse is also present in the treaty between Ashurnerari V of Assyria and Matiel of Arpad: "may his land [be reduced] to wasteland, may only an area of the size of a brick (be left) for [him to stand upon]" (SAA 2.2 i 4–6). See also the curse in the loyalty oaths to Esarhaddon: "May Šamaš with an iron plow [overtu]rn yo[ur] city and your district" (SAA 2.6: 545–46 [§68]; Shaw 1993, 113; Smith-Christopher 2015, 125). Appropriating the language of the outside enemy concerning the punishment for violating a binding agreement, the author threatens the elite of Jerusalem with a reversal of fortune.

In an inscription found at Deir Allah, written in a hitherto unknown Semitic script, the noun *ʿy* occurs in the following lines:

(1) The houses have fallen in heaps of ruins (*ʿym*),
(2) and the spring has poured out covering them,
(3) and a curse has been placed. (Deir Allah no. 1140; see Shea 1989, 103–7)

The noun "curse" indicates an element of punishment. As in Biblical Hebrew, the noun *zʿm* refers to divine rage that was inspired by human acts.

mountain of the house. In the Hebrew Bible, Zion and the temple of YHWH are seen as being built on a hilltop or mountain (see, e.g., 2 Kgs 19:31; Isa 4:5; 8:18; 10:12, 32; 16:1; 18:7; 24:23; 29:8; 31:9; 37:32; Joel 3:17; Obad 17, 21; Mic 4:7; Pss 2:6; 48:2, 11; 74:2; 78:68; 125:1; 133:3). From a religio-historical perspective, hilltops and mountains are charismatic spaces that form an interface between the realms of God and humankind. It is therefore more than understandable that on Mount Zion a *bayit,* "house, temple," had been erected. This temple was the most important locus for communication with God in preexilic Yahwism. Both the hill and the temple were seen as "holy," meaning that they were spaces completely different from other spaces, with an extradimensional link to the space of the holy God.

will become high places. This holy space will be changed as a result of the *rāʿāh,* "evil," that will come over Jerusalem. The verb *hāyāh* expresses change in this context. Jerusalem will be bereft of its interface with the sacred, implying that communication with the divine realm will become complicated. The noun *bāmôt,* "high places," is used here in the plural. The Hebrew word *bāmāh* can be used of an elevated spot in the landscape, a hill or a mountain, as well as an illegitimate sanctuary (Vaughan 1974). The ambiguity seems to be intended here. Treating the house of YHWH as a *bāmāh* sanctuary leads to its transformation into a wooded hilltop.

with forest. The construct chain expresses the *genitivus qualitatis:* the hilltops will be covered with "forest." The noun *yaʿar,* "forest, wood, thicket," occasionally refers to a desolate forest (Isa 21:13, Hos 2:14, Mic 3:12 = Jer 26:18; King 1988, 120–21). What once was an abode for the cult will be turned into a space to avoid (Hillers 1964, 44–54).

Comments

The whole of Micah 3 ends with a fierce prophecy of doom. Once more, the leading elite in Judah are reproached for their breaking of the social and religious codes of ancient Israel and for their lack of responsibility in a time of crisis (Zimran 2021). The people in charge are condemned because they value money as a central item in their mindscape (Arena 2020, 159). Even the word of God has its price on the free market. In thinking and acting this way, they build Jerusalem with blood and not upon the foundation of justice (see also R. L. Smith 1984, 34–35; Gignilliat 2019, 140–47).

The judgment will be a catastrophe. The beautiful city and its temple mount will be ruined and turned into pieces of land that can be plowed (not into an undesirable wilderness; contra Bail 2004, 32–38). Ironically, the author uses words for this shift

that echo the language of haughtiness to be found in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions in the description of the fate of the capital city of a disloyal vassal.

There is more at stake than human pride, which will have its fall. Micah criticizes the economic system of his days in which the elite act as if there is no moral code. This acting with God between brackets is still very common.

Peace: A Panorama (4:1–5)

4 [1]In days to come
the mountain of the temple
will be established as head of the mountains,
and will be raised above the hills.
Nations will come streaming to it;
[2]many nations will walk.
They will say:
"Let us go up the mountain of YHWH
to the house of Jacob's God.
May he teach us about his ways;
we will walk in his paths.
For from Zion will come forth the instruction,
the word of YHWH will come from Jerusalem."
[3]He will settle disputes between the nations,
and reprove the great powers far away.
They will hammer their swords into hoes
and their spears into pruning knives.
A nation shall not raise a sword against a nation,
never train for war again.
[4]Each will sit under his vine and his fig tree,
and no one will startle them.
For the mouth of YHWH of hosts has spoken.
[5]Though all the nations will go,
each in the name of its god,
we will go in the name of YHWH, our God,
for ever and ever.

Introduction

As is well known, there are striking similarities between this text in Micah 4 and Isaiah 2 (already observed by Origin, *Epistula ad Africanum* 21.15; see Roukema 2019, 102). The scholarly discussion on this point has not reached a consensus yet. Four possibilities present themselves:

1. The text in Micah is original, and Isaiah borrowed it.
2. The text in Isaiah is original, and Micah borrowed it (or the editors of this book).
3. Both adopted an already existing hymn from the Jerusalem cult tradition.
4. The text is a late interpolation in both books.

These possibilities are presented and defended in the various commentaries and studies on Micah, with a preference among scholars for the final one.

The first position is defended by various scholars who believe that the idiom of the section fits better with Micah (Cannawurf 1963; Willi-Plein 1971, 82–84; Renaud 1977, 196–235; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 397; Rudman 2001).

The second option has been supported by Sellin (1922, 281; see also Rudolph 1975, 77–78; Kessler 1999, 178–83; Bail 2004, 99–101). It has been elaborated by van der Woude (1969; 1973; 1976, 25–32) in his proposal that the optimistic opponents of Micah are quoting Isaiah as an objection to Micah's prophecy of doom. Their argument would have been: you, Micah, bothersome dreamer, might prophesy doom and exile; but the great prophet Isaiah already said something else. Van der Woude's view is attractive to some degree, especially since he is pointing to a very early example of abusing scripture by quoting it almost literally. According to Jenson (2008, 142–44), the section is not original in Micah, but he fails to indicate the source of the text.

Sweeney (2001) construes the two texts to represent different voices in a debate on how to cope with Persian imperial power. Since both voices seem to be based on an older tradition, Sweeney's view is close to the third possibility. Parallel but different is the view of Gignilliat (2019, 150–55), who assumes that both Micah and Isaiah adapted an existing tradition to the circumstances of the eighth century BCE. Some scholars argue that both Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 go back to a traditional text (Weiser 1949, 234; Waltke 2007, 191–92; Jeremias 2007, 170–71; Macchi 2016).

In the footsteps of Wellhausen (1963, 142–43; see also McKane 1998, 117–27; Wagenaar 2001a, 261–73; Wilson 2017b, 191–92), many scholars argue that the unit is a postexilic insertion in both Micah and Isaiah (option 4; see also Mays 1976, 94–96; Zapff 2003; Th. Krüger 2007; O'Brien 2015, 42; De Moor 2020, 190–91).

Although Hillers (1984, 53; see also Shaw 1993, 99) stated that "it would be fatuous to suppose that one could at this date settle the question of the authorship of Micah 4:1–5," I would like to present some arguments in favor of option 3 by considering some other texts from the Hebrew Bible.

In Joel 4:10 (ET 3:10) the following summons is found:

> Hammer your hoes into swords,
> And your pruning knives into spears;
> Let the weak say,
> "I am a mighty man."

In view of the assumed dates of the writing of Micah, Isaiah, and Joel, this call to prepare for war is generally seen as a reversal of the vision of peace in Micah 4 // Isaiah 2. But why not see it the other way around and view the authors of Micah and Isaiah as bending traditional language of warfare into the idiom of peace? There is no way to prove this possibility. There are, however, a few pieces of evidence that might reinforce it. In Jer 22:6–7, the following oracle of doom against Judah is found (see Lundbom 2004, 121–27; Mastnjak 2016, 207–10):

You are like Gilead to me,
    Like the summit of the Lebanon;
Yet most assuredly I will make you like a wilderness,
    Like cities that are not.
For I will send destroyers against you,
    Each man with his weapons.
And they will cut down your fine cedar beams
    And throw them on the fire.

Both the themes and the imagery in this text are similar to those of Mic 3:12. That text too, just before Mic 4:1–5, narrates extermination with the imagery of the overthrow of a city and its transformation into agricultural land. Unlike Micah 4, Jeremiah 22 is not followed by a promise of salvation but by a description of the consequences and effects of the overthrow:

Then many peoples will pass by this city and ask each other:
    Why did YHWH do this to this great city?
And they will say:
    Because they forsook the covenant with YHWH their God,
    prostrated themselves before other gods and served them.
        (Jer 22:8–9; see Lundbom 2004, 121–27; Mastnjak 2016, 207–10)

There is an important intertextual link between Mic 4:1–5 and this text from Jeremiah 22:

Mic 4:2 Many nations will walk. They will say . . .
Jer 22:8 Many nations will pass by this city . . . And they will say . . .

Only the verbs are different: *hālak,* "to walk," and *ʿābar,* "to pass by." These verbs, however, belong to the same semantic field. Both depict a motion in the direction of Jerusalem and evoke the image of a people's pilgrimage. The major difference is that in Micah, many nations make a positive move to Jerusalem, whereas in Jeremiah, they are amazed by the fate of Jerusalem. Motifs, language, and composition comparable to Jeremiah 22 are present in the admonition in Deut 29:23–25 (ET 29:24–26; Mastnjak 2016, 207–10) and the prayer of Solomon on the occasion of the consecratory celebration of the temple (1 Kgs 9:8–9).

These observations lead to the assumption of the existence of an ancient anthem containing the elements of the decultivation of land and city, nations passing by the ruins of Zion, and a call for the preparation of war. This hymn is quoted by both Micah and Isaiah, albeit in a twisted version: because of the compassion of YHWH, war is no longer needed since the nations will come peacefully to Jerusalem (see Becking 2020a).

Micah 4:1–5 is organized in the literary pattern of concentric symmetry. When such a form is the expression of reversal or transformation, then the ideas expressed in the axis contain the motor that stimulates the changes (see also P. A. Krüger 2012). In the center of the oracle, the following words stand: "For from Zion will come forth the instruction, / the word of YHWH will come from Jerusalem." In other words, the forthcoming changes are to be effected by a change in God. He will turn himself toward humankind in spite of the sinful behavior described in the previous two chapters.

It should be noted that the version in Isa 2:2–5 differs slightly from that of Mic 4:1–5. The majority of these differences are of no great importance since synonyms are being used. Only the final line differs more extensively: "Go, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of YHWH" (Isa 2:5). Since this difference is connected to the place that the "poem of peace" has received in the composition of both Micah 2–5 and Isaiah 1–12 (Wilson 2017a), there is no need to change the text of Mic 4:5 or construe it as a later addition (thus Willi-Plein 1971, 85; De Moor 2015, 211–13). Ancient manuscripts almost unanimously contain a major divider after verse 5 (De Moor 2017). This last verse brings the reader back to the present: the forthcoming changes summon the reader to act according to the Yahwistic moral code (Gignilliat 2019, 160–64). The idea that 4:5 would represent a "premonotheistic" phase in the religion of Israel (Robinson and Horst 1964, 141) should be abandoned. The reference to the gods of the nations should be read as an example of conditional acceptance (see Becking 2020b).

Notes

4:1. *In days to come*. Nations will come streaming to Zion "in days to come." The Hebrew phrase *bĕʾaḥrît hayyāmîm* can be compared with the Akkadian idiom *ina aḫrat/arkat umî*. See, for instance, "In the future, in far-off days (*i-na ár-kàt* u_4*-me i-na* u_4*-me ṣa-a-ti*), may a future ruler, one of the kings, my descendants, renovate its dilapidated section(s)" (Esarhaddon 77.59–60; Leichty 2011, 156 // 78.42–43; Leichty 2011, 159, 104 vii:19; Leichty 2011, 201; the expression is also used in the inscriptions of Ashurbanipal).

The expression *bĕʾaḥrît hayyāmîm* refers to a decisive turn in time—not the end of time, but rather the end of a period and the beginning of a new one (see, e.g., Kosmala 1963; Kessler 1999, 183; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 401–2; Ben Zvi 2000, 95; De Moor 2020, 201). The salvation described in Mic 4:1–5 is hoped for in the future, but within the limits of time and Israelite history after the people go through a period of chastening. The "end of time" is not implied (contra Gärtner 2012, 340). The author of Micah 2–5 offers a prophetic, but not an apocalyptic, eschatology.

the mountain of the temple. The noun *har,* "mountain," refers to the hilltop in Jerusalem on which the temple was built. The expression *bêt-YHWH* indicates that the veneration of YHWH has been or should have been the focal activity of this temple. Omitting "house, temple," the LXX reads *'oros tou kuriou,* "the mountain of the Lord," probably adapting the text to Mic 4:2 (Glenny 2015, 92–93).

will be established as head of the mountains. The verb *kûn,* "to make firm, establish," is part of the semantic field of building/constructing. The verb is often used in the context of creation (e.g., Ps 8:8, Isa 62:7, Job 31:15; see Paas 2003, 52–72). In a subtle

way, the author claims that the Temple Mount, after its reversal into a heap of ruins, will be created anew by God.

The *bêt* in *bĕrō'š,* "as a head," should be construed as a *bêt-essentiae* underpinning the new identity of Zion (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §11.2.5e; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 403; Wagenaar 2001a, 131–32; Dempster 2017, 125). The "mountains" primarily refer to the hilltops surrounding Jerusalem. Since hilltops can have a mythic function as an interface between the earthly realm and the divine abode, the phrase could also have an implicit monotheistic meaning: not the mountains of the other gods, but only the mountain of YHWH will be the real locus of veneration.

and will be raised above the hills. The Ni. of the verb *nāśā'* describes the process of being brought to a more elevated position, higher and more important than before. This elevation should not be construed in a geographical way but should be seen as metaphoric (Waltke 2007, 194). This rise could be social or psychological (see, e.g., Ps 139:20) or spatial (Isa 40:4, the valleys). Micah 4:1 expresses the idea that the mountain of God will become more important than ever before. Both *nākôn,* "to be established," and *niśśā',* "to be raised," are passive Ni. forms that can be construed as *passivum divinum*. Although not named, it is YHWH who will bring the mountain into a prime position.

The preposition *min* in this verse is a comparative marker: Zion will be more important *than* the other hills (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §11.2.11e).

De Moor (2020, 198–99) indicates that the theme of a holy city that will be raised above all other cities is present in the ancient Near East. He refers to two texts: first, the Sumerian mythological composition *Ninurta's Return to Nibru* (Nippur). As a result of Ninurta's slaying of a great number of demons and monsters, the world will return to normal:

> Let my beloved city, the sanctuary Nibru, raise its head as high as heaven. Let my city be pre-eminent among the cities of my brothers. Let my temple rise (?) the highest . . . among the temples of my brothers. Let the territory of my city be the freshwater well of Sumer. Let the Anuna, my brother gods, bow down there. Let their flying birds establish nests in my city. Let their refugees refresh themselves in my shade. (A n—g i m d í m—m a; *ETCSL* t.1, 6.1: 168–74; Black 2006, 185)

Second, in a Neo-Assyrian hymn on the city of Arbela, the city is praised as follows:

> Arbela is as lofty as heaven.
> Its foundations are as firm as the heavens.
> The pinnacles of Arbela are lofty, it vies with [. . .].
> Its likeness is Babylon, it compares with Assur.
> O lofty sanctuary, shrine of the fates, gate of heaven!
> Tribute from [all la]nds enters into it.
>
> (LKA 32 = SAA 3.8:14–19)

In the book of Micah, the elevation of the Temple Mount is a first feature of reversal and interchange. In the present of Micah, the Temple Mount is a relatively low hill surrounded by higher mountains, but *in the future,* it will stand out above all the others.

Nations will come streaming to it. The Hebrew words *gôy* and *ʿām* are synonymous but not completely overlapping terms for a "group of people." The later development of *gôy* as a reference to non-Israelites or non-Jews did not start before the Hellenistic era. The freedom with which both nouns are used throughout the Hebrew Bible makes it difficult to decide the exact connotation of them in a given text. In Mic 4:1–5, no semantic distinction between the two can be made.

The verb *nāhar,* "to stream," evokes the image of the nations flowing to Jerusalem as rivers flow through the countryside (Smith-Christopher 2015, 129). Andersen and Freedman (2000, 403) have suggested that the imagery is used solely in the Hebrew Bible to "describe the movement of worshippers to a festival of their god." It is an intriguing idea to assume that the nations would come to Jerusalem to worship YHWH. However, there is a problem with this view. The two instances outside Isaiah 2 // Micah 4 that contain the verb *nāhar* do not clearly mention a religious festival. Jeremiah 31:12 contains the promise that in the future the scattered people of Israel will flow to "the goodness of God." However, the text is unclear as to the character of this "goodness"; it could be a cultic ceremony or the absence of terror in the land. Jeremiah 51:44 mentions that the fall of Babel will make an end to the advent of streams of people to Bel but does not refer to a specific ceremony. This implies that the aim of the streaming of the nations to Jerusalem cannot be specified. For the sake of completeness, it should be remarked that in two texts (Ps 34:6, Isa 60:5) the verb *nāhar* signifies "to shine." This meaning, however, does not fit the context of Isaiah 2 // Micah 4. The view of Driver (1943, 14–15) that the verb *nāhar* could in some instances mean "to be noisily excited" is not convincing.

4:2. *many nations will walk*. The Masoretic delimitation is slightly odd, since the last line of verse 1 forms a wonderful parallelism with the first line of verse 2. The "many nations" parallel the "nations" while the verbs "to stream" and "to go, come, walk" refer to comparable movements in the direction of Zion.

An intriguing parallel can be found in a bilingual hymn to the god Anu from the Seleucid era, in which it is promised that one day, deities other than Anu, as well as former enemies, will come to Uruk with the intention of prayer and obedience to Anu (AO 6461 = *TU* 43: Rev. 1–22; see Linssen 2004, 197–200; De Moor 2020, 199).

They will say. There is no reason to omit this line on the basis of its supposed absence in the LXX and its disturbance of meter (contra Hillers 1984, 50). The verb is present in the LXX (*erousin*). Arguments related to meter are, in my view, not decisive when making text-critical decisions.

Let us go up the mountain of YHWH. The construction of an imperative *lēkû,* "go!," with a cohortative *naʿălèh,* "let us go up," stresses the determination of the nations to come to Jerusalem (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §34.6). Both verbs are rather general indications for movement. The verb *cālah* is to be construed as a description of any movement that is going from "below" to "above," either in a literal or in a figurative way. The aim of this movement in Mic 4:2 is not prima facie clear but is unveiled in the rest of the verse. The author has the nations speak about Zion as the mountaintop where the realm of YHWH makes contact with that of humans.

to the house of Jacob's God. In the same way, the nations qualify the temple as belonging to the God of Israel. Implicitly, they accept the importance of YHWH not only for the people in Judah, but also for their own future.

May he teach us about his ways. The verb *yārāh* III, Hi., "to teach, instruct," refers to a meta-cognitive way of learning. In the forty-five occurrences of this verb in the Hebrew Bible, the instruction always concerns the basic attitude of people in life. The subject of teaching is never any form of what we might call "educated." Andersen and Freedman (2000, 404) correctly observe that the verbal form is a jussive. This implies that it is the wish of the nations to be instructed by the God of Israel.

The noun *dèrèk,* "way," is used metaphorically for human conduct; it denotes the "way of life" about which the nations are seeking to be instructed. In fact, the noun stands for "following the social and religious code of Ancient Israel" (Wagenaar 2001a, 135; Zehnder 1999, 294–384, 484–502). The preposition *min* before *dèrèk* has ablative force (Waltke 2007, 198): "about."

we will walk in his paths. Again, the verb *hālak,* "to go," is not meant literally but should be seen as a description of correct moral conduct. The noun *'ōraḥ,* "path," refers to a smaller way and stands like *dèrèk,* "way," for moral behavior (Zehnder 2011, 385–400, 484–502).

For from Zion will come forth the instruction. The author has the nations formulate their reasons to go up to Zion. They are aware that the anchor for their moral conduct can be found in this city. The noun *tôrāh,* "law, instruction," does not mean a written code of law in this context. It does not refer to the "five books of Moses"—which by the end of the eighth century BCE had not yet reached its present form—but to the instruction to lead a morally appropriate life (as for instance in Deut 17:11; Isa 1:10; Jer 2:8; Ezek 18:16, 20). What they are looking for is the cultural code of Yahwism as it had functioned before the disruption of the traditional form of community in Judah and Israel.

the word of YHWH will come from Jerusalem. The nations will accept that guiding words and instruction giving direction in life will be found only in Jerusalem, since they are coming from YHWH.

This pilgrimage to Zion is the second reversal in Mic 4:1–2. *Now* the people are coming to Jerusalem for battle and conquest. *Then* they will come to Jerusalem to learn the way of God and anchor their lives on his instruction.

4:3. *He will settle disputes between the nations*. The verb *šāpaṭ,* "to judge," here has the connotation of "ending a dispute between parties with a wise judgment" (Niehr 1986). The *we-qāṭal* form indicates that the act of judging should be construed as a result or follow-up of the divine instruction in 4:2. This implies that the nations are presented as accepting the role of YHWH as "judge over the world."

These are the same nations that are coming to Zion. They are assumed to have disputes among them that need to be settled. Which disputes remains unsaid, but it can be surmised that the perennial problems provoked by shortage of land, food, and commodities and hence power and control are at stake.

and reprove the great powers far away. The verb *yākaḥ,* Hi., "to reprove," indicates the set of actions by which one person reproaches another person for untoward deeds and doings. The act has, by implication, a corrective function. Abraham "reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away" (Gen 21:25). The psalmist prays "YHWH, do not reprove me in your wrath" (Ps 38:2). These and many other texts give the impression that the act of reproof was intended to settle a dispute between two parties. Again, the nations are presented as accepting the role of YHWH as "reprover" in the world.

The substantivized adjective *rāḥôq,* "far," refers to an almost unfathomable distance. The expression can be compared with "the ends of the earth." In other words, the realm of God as reprover is almost unlimited. The fact that "far away" is absent in Isaiah 2 is not sufficient grounds to assume that it is a later addition in Micah 4 (contra Willi-Plein 1971, 85; Jeremias 2007, 169).

They will hammer their swords into hoes. In the ancient Near East, it was the craft of a smith to "hammer" iron implements (McNutt 1990). A *ḥèrèb,* "sword, dagger," was an implement of quarrel and warfare, having a negative, destructive connotation (see Gabriel and Gichon 2003). Using the scarce commodity of iron to make swords implied a withdrawal of iron from more positive usages.

For the translation of *'et* with "hoe" and not with the traditional "plowshare" (see for instance Weiser 1949, 233; Robinson and Horst 1964, 140; Rudolph 1975, 76; Runions 2001, 152; De Moor 2020, 205–7: "plough-irons"), see the convincing arguments by Wagenaar (2001a, 138–39; also Waltke 2007, 200; already pondered upon by R. L. Smith 1984, 36). Hoes were of great importance in preparing the soil before planting and hence were a necessary tool in the agricultural system (Hopkins 1985, 228).

and their spears into pruning knives. Like a sword, a *ḥanît,* "spear," was an implement of war. Spears had a wooden shaft with an iron point bound to it. Spears were used for throwing at an enemy or for stabbing (see Gabriel and Gichon 2003).

A *mazmērāh,* "pruning knife," was used to trim the sprigs of a vine in order to have a better harvest of grapes. By pruning some branches, the vital energy of the tree was no longer wasted on unproductive twigs but was used to improve the fruit (Hopkins 1985, 227–80). The process is beautifully described in a prophecy against Cush (Isa 18:5):

> For before the harvest, as soon as the bud blossoms
> and the flower becomes a ripening grape,
> he will cut off the sprigs with pruning knives
> and remove and cut away the spreading branches.

A nation shall not raise a sword against a nation. As a result of the acceptance of YHWH as "judge over the world," disputes between nations will no longer be settled by warfare. Spears will remain in their sheaths.

never train for war again. The adverbial adjunct *lō' . . . 'ôd,* "no . . . longer," functions as an indicator of discontinuation (likewise Jer 30–31). What has been routine and regular will definitively be abandoned in days to come.

War is a primary human reflex in times of conflict. Because of the reversed circumstances, there will no longer be any need to learn warfare, since that way of solving controversies will become obsolete.

This verse depicts a double reversal. *At present,* nations have swords and spears. They are symbols of warfare indicating that the scarce natural resources of iron are abused for war. *In the future,* these will be transformed into hoes and pruning knives. These are symbols of agricultural life in which they serve humankind in its struggle for food. This change will be the result of an even greater change since, in the present days of the author, people are solving their problems by warfare. In days to come, they will solve their problems by following the impetus of the *tôrāh* from YHWH (see Albertz 1990).

4:4. *Each will sit under his vine and his fig tree*. The singular noun *'îš,* "man, person, husband," in combination with a plural verb form functions as a distributive pronoun

(Andersen and Freedman 2000, 408). This "each" contains both the nations and the Judaeans and should not be restricted to Israel (contra Wellhausen 1963, 143). Well-being will be worldwide.

The verb *yāšab,* "to sit," does not refer merely to the act of being seated on a bench or a chair but denotes the idea of being at home in the place where you presently are. In ancient Near Eastern texts, gods "dwelt" in their heavenly abodes as well as simultaneously in their earthly temples. Human beings can dwell on earth or in and around their houses.

Grapes and figs were two very important agricultural products in ancient Israel (Goor 1966; Hopkins 1985, 227–31). Vineyard and fig tree are well-known symbols describing the abundance of the Holy Land. The nineteenth-century BCE Egyptian novelist Sinuhe depicted the land Iaa, probably a district of Araru in Retenu (Canaan; see Parkinson 1998; Quirke 2004):

> It was a fair land, called Iaa.
> There were figs there and grapes.
> It had wine more abundant than water.
> Its honey was plentiful, its plant-oil without end.
> On its trees were all kinds of fruit
> There was barley there and wheat,
> And unlimited cattle of every kind.
>
> (Sinuhe, 81–84; *CoS* 1.38)

Vine and fig trees are also used by the Rabshakeh of Sennacherib in his misleading plea to the Judaeans to surrender to the Assyrians. He suggests that peace with the king of Assur will lead to a situation in which the Judaeans will "eat, each one, from his vine and each from his fig tree, and drink, each one, the waters of his own cistern" (2 Kgs 18:31, NASB). This reference in Sinuhe and the remark by the Assyrian marshal are indications that the image used by the author of Micah 4 should be seen as a traditional metaphor for a good life. The claim that "vine and fig tree" are trees from paradise that hence do not need the effort of farming has no support in ancient texts (Sellin 1922, 282).

The agrarian image is absent in Isaiah 2. This difference can be related to the diverging points of view between Isaiah and Micah: Micah came from an agrarian context, and Isaiah was a city dweller.

no one will startle them. The reassuring clause *wĕ'ên maḥarîd,* "nobody will startle," occurs a dozen times in the Hebrew Bible. Originally the expression functioned as underscoring the gravity of the curses for breaking the covenant. The birds of heaven will not be startled when devouring the dead body of a cursed person who has transgressed the stipulations of the covenant (Deut 28:26; an echo of that use is found in Nah 2:12). In the prophetic oracles of salvation this concept was turned upside down: God will take care that "in days to come" nobody's good life will be disrupted negatively (see, e.g., Isa 17:2, Jer 30:10, Ezek 19:26, Mic 4:4). An effect of this reversal is found in the later text of Lev 26:6, where the expression is part of the blessing for those who will be faithful to YHWH.

In the inscription excavated at Wadi Brisa in Lebanon, the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II states: "I let the people in Lebanon settle themselves in green

pastures. Someone who would frighten them, I will not hand over to them" (Nebuchadnezzar [Nbk] II Wadi Brisa inscription: B xi 47–49; see Da Riva 2012; De Moor 2020, 209). The expression, apparently a stock phrase in ancient Near Eastern royal ideology, is here transformed to describe God's sheltering love for Israel. In this inscription, a statue of the Babylonian king will be a reassuring symbol; in Micah 4, this functional space is empty of images but filled with the divine instruction (Mic 4:2).

Again, the theme of the reversal of reality is present. *At present,* the land is laid waste; the harvest is broken or stolen by soldiers. *In the future,* everyone will live in peace among their own vineyards and fig trees, and no one will make anyone afraid. This formula is used as a description of abundance and undisturbed peace and security (Wagenaar 2001a, 140). The shortage of food caused by the temporary drier climate in the decades before 700 BCE will be undone.

For the mouth of YHWH of hosts has spoken. The Hebrew noun *pèh,* "mouth," has a broad range of meaning. In this connection, the emphasis is on the powerful words spoken by YHWH. The formula underscores the importance of Mic 4:1–5. The words of reversal are presented as being of divine origin and not the delusion of a human mind. The specifier *ṣebā'ôt,* "of hosts," evokes the picture of YHWH as a warrior god supported by heavenly armies (Mettinger 1999).

4:5. *Though all the nations will go*. The particle *kî* introduces a conditional clause and is hence to be rendered with "though" (*DCH* 4:386–87; Kessler 1999, 178; Wagenaar 2001a, 141; Dempster 2017, 126; see the discussion on possible ways to construe *kî* in Utzschneider 1999, 159–64). In this concluding verse, a distinction is made between the conduct of the others—all the nations—and the behavior of the Judaeans. As in 4:2, the verb *hālak,* "to go," is not meant literally but should be seen as a description of correct moral conduct.

each in the name of its god. The noun *šēm,* "name," has in this expression the connotation of the moral code as supposedly inherent to a specific deity. In behaving according to these norms, a nation presents its deity in the earthly realm (Brongers 1965a).

we will go in the name of YHWH, our God. The Judaeans will take a different road through life. There are two ways to query this line: (1) Are the Judaeans supposed to live according to the moral code of YHWH while awaiting the decisive change in the future? or, (2) will it be self-evident in the forthcoming era that they will keep the laws of God? Both options are possible and might even be connected: in the penultimate era it would be good to live a loyal life that foreshadows life in the "days to come."

for ever and ever. The expression *lĕʿôlām wāʿèd,* "for ever and ever," does not include speculations about eternity or the endlessness of time before and after now. What is meant is that there will be a qualified time after the decisive reversal in time. Israel's existence will be qualified by God's actions and human loyalty to YHWH.

Comments

Micah 4:1–5 contains elements of hope for a time beyond the catastrophe (Zimmerli 1971; Ben Zvi 2000, 94–107; Zapff 2003). In short, the world to come viewed by Micah is the fundamental reversal of the world in which he now lives. Dark and light, black and white, fear and freedom, poverty and richness are interchanged. In predigital days, photos were made on a film. When developed you could see the pictures, but

reversed: black became white. Only when a print was made did the reality return. This image from the world of photography might be a metaphor for Micah's message (see Brueggemann 1997, 499–502). There is a clear contrast between the *now* of the prophet and the future to come (as indicated in the Notes at 4:1–5).

The forthcoming changes are to be effected by a change in God. He will turn himself toward humankind in spite of the sinful behavior described in the previous two chapters. Peace and fertility will be brought to the area. This promise, however, is not without its consequences. In the "now" of the author, his fellow men and women are urged to follow the Yahwistic moral code (Mic 4:5; Waltke 2007, 204–20; Smith-Christopher 2015, 138–39; Gignilliat 2019, 160–64). The "amen" to the forthcoming world of peace implies acts in the here and now (Mays 1976, 99; Hillers 1984, 51; R. L. Smith 1984, 38; Jeremias 2007, 174–75). This functionality of 4:5 makes it unlikely that the verse is a later addition (contra Sellin 1922, 282–83; McKane 1998, 124–26). Levinas (1979, 21–25) argued that although eschatological visions stand against the stream of war-driven history, their origins from "beyond" make them a ground for morality.

The enduring power of this panorama of peace can easily be traced in the cultural history of humankind. I give only three examples of many.

1. The traditional Southern spiritual "Down by the Riverside" includes the words "Gonna lay down my sword and shield." The lyrics of this song make clear that the message of Micah 4 has been appropriated to the circumstances of the early years of the twentieth century CE. The "I" in the song will no longer study war (see Smith-Christopher 2015, 21–22).
2. The Soviet (but de facto Ukrainian) sculptor Yevgeny Vuchetich, a representative of Socialist Realism, created the sculpture "Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares" that was placed in the gardens around the headquarters of the United Nations in New York in 1956. It is intriguing to observe that during the Cold War the Soviets, by then atheists, donated an artifact that was based on Jewish-Christian tradition (Peters 2015, xii; De Moor 2020, 194).
3. In the former German Democratic Republic, Christian churches provided the initiative for the movement called *Schwerter zu Pflugscharen* (swords to plowshares). The ruling Communist Party was not amused by this striving for peace. However, the movement turned out to be one of the breeding grounds for *Die Wende* in 1989 that led to the opening of East Germany's borders (see Silomon 1999).

A Future for the Lame (4:6–7)

4 [6]On that day—oracle of YHWH—
"I will collect the lame
and I will gather the banished,
those whom I treated badly.
[7]I will set the lame as a remnant
and those removed as a mighty nation."
YHWH will reign over them on the mountain of Zion
from now and forevermore.

Introduction

The presence of a *petucha* at the end of verse 7 indicates that it and verse 6 together form a small unit (*pace* Andersen and Freedman 2000, 427–32, who construe vv. 6–8 as a unit). The Masoretic division is supported by almost all ancient manuscripts (De Moor 2017, 149; 2020, 195–97). Bail (2004, 102–3) considers 4:6–7 to be part of a greater unit (4:1–7). The language and content of the two verses resemble those of Mic 2:12–13 (Gignilliat 2019, 165–67). Some scholars even propose to relocate 2:12–13 after 4:6–7 (Condamin 1902; Renaud 1977, 130–44). Since 2:12–13 function well at their present spot in the unfolding discourse, there is no need to replace those verses. Micah 4:6–7 contain an oracle of salvation promising those "whom I treated badly" a return to Jerusalem under the kingship of YHWH (Hillers 1984, 54–55; Cruz 2016, 199–203). The words should be construed as part of Micah's promises for the second temporal stage. They are not part of a later redaction (contra Robinson and Horst 1964, 141; Zapff 1997, 52–62; Wagenaar 2001a, 273–74; Schütte 2016, 106–9; De Moor 2020, 190–91) and do not reflect the ideas of Micah's opponents (*pace* van der Woude 1976, 141–45).

Notes

4:6. *On that day—oracle of YHWH—*. This adverbial adjunct continues the temporal dimension of *bĕʾaḥarît hayyāmîm,* "in days to come" (4:1). This implies that the "gathering and return" will take place in the same decisive period (Jenson 2008, 149; Dempster 2017, 135; De Moor 2020, 210). The oft-occurring expression *nĕʾum YHWH,* "utterance/oracle of the Lord," claims a divine origin for the contents of the two verses.

I will collect the lame. Both verbs, *ʾāsap* || *qābaṣ,* have a positive connotation and are used as metaphors for the return of the people of God from exile (see Notes at 2:12) and, perhaps, a form of "pastoral care." The context of both verbs in Mic 4:6–7 indicates that a return from exile is meant.

The word *ṣōlēʿāh,* "lame, limping one," is to be construed as a feminine participle of the verb *ṣāla',* "to limp." The form occurs in Zeph 3:19, which is very much a parallel to Mic 4:6–7. In Genesis it is narrated that Jacob met the sunrise "as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip," after his encounter with the nameless divine at the Jabbok (*ṣōlēa';* Gen 32:31). The choice of this very particular word for "lame" evokes a comparison between Jacob returning from his days with Laban and Israel returning from exile (see Bail 2004, 137–41). Like Jacob, the exiles will not return untouched or unmoved.

and I will gather the banished. This participle is derived from the verb *nādaḥ,* "to banish." It is used particularly for those who were sent away into exile (e.g., Neh 1:9, Isa 11:12, Jer 30:17; see also 2 Kgs 17:21). The word classifies those in exile as people being punished for their conduct.

those whom I treated badly. The author has YHWH admit in retrospect that banishing many of his people, although he did so because of their illicit conduct, was an act without mercy. For the two-staged futurology of Micah 2–5, this implies that in future days God will realize that imminent doom will have negative aspects for Israel and Judah. This understanding by God of having acted too harshly will be one of the reasons for his shift to forgiveness for his people, leading to the return of the dispersed. This movement can be seen as a parallel to the healing of the incurable wound (Jer 30:12–19).

4:7. *I will set the lame as a remnant*. The noun *šĕʾērît,* "remnant," continues the theme of Mic 2:12. Some will survive and return. Van der Woude (1976, 143–44) argues that in view of the parallel expression "mighty nation," which he reads as "abundant nation," *šĕʾērît* cannot mean "remnant," referring to a small number of people, and should be rendered with "progeny" (see also Andersen and Freedman 2000, 435–36). In my view, this interpretation is slightly forced. I read 4:7a as a prophecy stating that God will restore the "lame and the banished" as a powerful remnant. In addition, Hasel (1974) has convincingly argued that the concept of the "remnant" does not occur only in late texts. Hence, the presence of the noun *šĕʾērît* cannot be used as an argument for a late date of 4:6–7 (contra Wellhausen 1963, 143–44).

and those removed as a mighty nation. The verb *hālāʾ,* Ni., "to be removed," is attested in only this verse in the whole of the Hebrew Bible. Despite some ingenious emendations (Sellin 1922, 283; Wellhausen 1963, 143; Willi-Plein 1971, 86; Mays 1976, 99; Williamson 1997, 364–65: from a verb *ḥālāʾlʾh,* "the sick"), the word needs no change since it refers to those who were removed from Judah and stands parallel to

the "banished" in 4:6 (van der Woude 1976, 144; Kessler 1999, 191; Wagenaar 2001a, 145–46; Waltke 2007, 222).

Although the adjective *ʿāṣûm* occasionally means "numerous" (see, e.g., Gen 18:18), its basic meaning is "mighty" in the sense of powerful. In the image of the future in Mic 4:6–7, the dispersed will be turned into a small (remnant) but powerful group, as seen already in the LXX and Vulgate.

YHWH will reign over them. The metaphor of YHWH as king has a broad range of meaning that can differ from text to text (Brettler 1989). In this passage on future rule and kingship, God is the ultimate ruler whether he rules himself or indirectly via an earthly representative as in Mic 5:1–5 (Wilson 2017b, 190–94). The shift from first-person singular to 3.m.s. indicates that this clause should be seen as the conclusion by the author of Micah 2–5 of the promises made in the previous announcement.

on the mountain of Zion. This expression connects the oracle regarding the reversal of the fate of the lame and banished with the previous section on the panorama of peace (Mic 4:1–5). Returning Israel, just like the nations, will be judged and ruled from this new navel of the earth. This implies that they too must submit to the religious and moral code of the God of Zion.

from now and forevermore. The expression *lĕʿôlām wāʿed,* "for ever and ever," from 4:5, is rephrased here.

Comments

The hope depicted in Mic 4:1–5 is not restricted to those who live in and around Jerusalem but is also directed at those who will be sent into exile. Their fate is qualified as punishment for their deeds and doings. Intriguingly, YHWH admits that by banishing his people, he did something wrong to them. As a result of the mental shift in God, a shift will take place in the fate of the exiles: they will return to Zion and live under the good guidance of God.

This small unit of Mic 4:6–7 shows divine broad-mindedness and the "breadth and length, height and depth" of the intervention of God with humankind (Eph 3:18). God is not always punishing, nor is he only offering love. The author of Micah offers an image of a God of everlasting commitment to true believers. His conduct is determined in reaction to human behavior.

A Twofold Transformation (4:8–10)

4 [8]You, tower-of-the-flock, hill of daughter Zion,
to you will come and be brought
the former rule,
the kingship over the daughter of Jerusalem.
[9]Now, why do you cry loudly?
Is there no king with you
—or has your counselor perished—
that pain has gripped you like a woman in labor?
[10]Writhe and burst forth, daughter of Zion,
like a woman in labor.
For now, you have to leave the city,
settle in a field
and come to Babylon.
There, you will be saved!
There, YHWH will redeem you from the hand of your enemies!

Introduction

Micah 4:8–10 consists of two parts. Verse 8 is an oracle of salvation promising the restoration of kingship in Jerusalem (Wagenaar 2001a, 274–78). Verses 9–10 are a complex unit that starts with questions about the sorrowful situation in Jerusalem and gives an answer applying the two stages of futurology in Micah 2–5. First, the people must go into exile, but from there they will safely return. The mention of Babylon is at first sight unexpected since at the end of the eighth century BCE the Assyrians were the dominant world power. The Babylonian rise to power was still a century in the future. Is the mention of Babylon a later scribal error? Is verse 10 as a whole a later redactional addition, maybe as part of an exilic extension of Micah (so Robinson and Horst 1964, 141; McKane 1998, 134–43; Kessler 1999, 196–98; Wagenaar 2001a, 278–87; Schütte

2016, 109–10)? To some scholars, the mention of Babylon is clearly and evidently an anachronism.

I challenge this view, which is based upon the assumption that the announcement of an exile to Babylon would make sense only in a period when the Neo-Babylonian Empire was in control of the Fertile Crescent. I agree that the verse makes perfectly good sense in the context of the period of the conquests of Jerusalem by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar II. That period, however, is not the only lock in which the key of the text fits. It would be methodologically reductionistic to look only at one possibility.

Two other historical moments could be seen as context for the announcement. On the one hand, the author might have thought about the rising power of the Babylonian sheikh Merodakh-baladan (see Jenson 2008, 151) or another event at the end of the eighth century BCE (Smith-Christopher 2015, 146). At that time Babylon was already a rising power that was stopped only temporarily by the Neo-Assyrians (Brinkman 1964). On the other hand, the following should be kept in mind. After the double conquest of Samaria in 722 and 720 BCE, the Assyrians populated their renamed province Samerina with people from Babylonian cities and hamlets (2 Kgs 17:24; see Rudolph 1975, 87; Jenson 2008, 151). Elsewhere, I have argued that all five dwelling places mentioned in 2 Kgs 17:24 are to be located in southern Babylonia, in areas recently conquered by the Assyrians (Becking 1992). In view of the Assyrian policy of populating conquered areas with people from areas to which people from those conquered areas were exiled, it is at least a possibility that Israelites, and perhaps Judaeans, were exiled to Babylonia (van der Woude 1976, 156–57). I therefore wonder whether the mention of Babylon really is an anachronism. In short, the mention of Babylon is an insufficient reason to assume redactional activity.

According to De Moor (2020, 213–68) the core of Mic 4:8–5:14 is to be construed as the oldest layer in the book. In his view, this unit reflects the sorrowful situation in Jerusalem during the Syro-Ephraimite War. De Moor argues that at this stage of his prophetic career, Micah is still optimistic about the future of the Davidic dynasty. In my view, it is hermeneutically premature to connect the poetic words of Micah with a specific episode of the history of Israel and Judah. I prefer to connect the elements of "gruesomeness" and "hope" to the two stages in the prophetic futurology.

Notes

4:8. *You, tower-of-the-flock, hill of daughter Zion*. After the oracles regarding the nations and the banished, the author addresses the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The use of the pronoun *'attāh,* "you," gives the address an extra emphasis (Wagenaar 2001a, 147). The outcome of the oracle is inevitable. The inhabitants of the city are addressed via two local landmarks.

Of the various towers of Jerusalem, the author chooses the "sheep tower" in order to establish a connection to the themes of the "flock" and the "gathering of the sheep" earlier in Micah 2–5. As van der Woude (1976, 145–46;) has argued (see also Waltke 2007, 230–31), the parallelism with *'ōpel bat-ṣîyyôn,* "hill of the daughter of Zion," makes improbable the interpretation of Sellin (1922, 286) that the "tower-of-the-flock" refers to a stronghold on the way from Rama to Hebron, and hence close to Bethlehem, and its implication for the birthplace of the promised king outside Jerusalem.

Cazelles (1965) suggested that Migdal Eder might have been a large village in the vicinity of Jerusalem to which refugees had fled after the conquest of Samaria. Renaud (1977, 191) strongly and convincingly argues against this thesis, which is based on too many speculative suggestions (see also Waltke 2007, 230).

An *ʿōpel* was a bump or an elevation within the landscape. The noun is often used for a mound within the walls of a city or a citadel built on a mountain (see, e.g., 2 Kgs 5:24, Isa 32:14; Mesha *KAI* 181:21–22 = *CoS* 2.23; Kessler 1999, 199; Wagenaar 2001a, 148; Runions 2001, 155; De Moor 2020, 234).

The expression *bat-ṣîyyôn,* "daughter Zion," is an affectionate way to refer to the population of Jerusalem (Floyd 2008; De Moor 2020, 234). The inhabitants of Zion will be the recipients of salvation.

to you will come and be brought. The verb *ʾātāh*, "to come," should not be construed as an Aramaism, although it occurs frequently in Aramaic and its various dialects; see for instance *maràna<u>t</u>ha,* "our lord come!" (1 Cor 16:22)—but as an archaic and lofty synonym for *bôʾ,* "to come." The verb *ʾātāh* is attested in various preexilic Hebrew texts (Deut 33:2, 21; Jer 3:22, 12:9) as well as in Ugaritic (*DUL3*, 119–20; De Moor 2020, 235) and in Punic (Levi Della Vida 1964), which is an indication that the verb has Canaanite roots. The verb *bôʾ* also has the connotation "to bring." The two synonymous verbs occur six times in parallelism in the Hebrew Bible (Deut 33:2; Isa 41:25, 44:7; Mic 4:8; Job 3:25; Prov 1:27; see Hillers 1984, 56; Shaw 1993, 100). They form a nice hendiadys, suggesting that the surmise that after the first verbal form an object has fallen out is improbable (*pace* Andersen and Freedman 2000, 432).

former rule. Within the proto-apocalyptic view of history as an interchange of good times and bad times, the *mèmšālāh riʾšonāh,* "former rule," does not refer to the return of the kingship, and the last king, as before the disaster. The expression refers to the rule of an idealized king from the youthful days of Israel when all relations with YHWH were still unbroken. This king will usher Israel into the new age and will rule as a *Heilszeitherrscher* (ruler over the time of salvation) in days to come (see Höffken 1977). He stands parallel to the "prince of peace" (Isa 9) and the "son of man" (Dan 7). In Gen 1:16, it is stated that the "sun" and the "moon" were made for a benign rulership (*mèmšālāh*) over day and night.

the kingship over the daughter of Jerusalem. The noun *mamlèkèt,* "kingship," is a synonym of *mèmšālāh*. Both are abstracts and refer to the way the future ruler will lead his people, namely, by applying the religious and social codes of Yahwism. The LXX adds here "from Babylon," which is certainly not original but an adaptation to verse 10. The addition interprets the new rule as a liberation from the Babylonian exile (Glenny 2015, 101; De Moor 2020, 236). The preposition *lĕ* functions as the expression of a *dativus possessivus* (see Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §11.2.10d). The synonym "daughter of Jerusalem" for the daughter of Zion has the same affectionate connotation for the inhabitants of the city, who will come under the caring reign of the ruler at the time of salvation.

4:9. *Now, why do you cry loudly?* In the Hebrew Bible, the act of "shouting out loud" (*rûaʿ*, Hi.) was performed on a variety of occasions. At 1 Sam 10:24, shouting was part of the acclamation of a new king. In Isa 44:23, the "depths of the earth" are summoned to cry for joy since YHWH has redeemed Jacob. Judges 7:21 speaks of a cry of panic. Micah 4:9 is an instance of mourning for the loss of a beacon in time of trouble

(Olyan 2004, 97–109). I disagree with Runions (2001, 155, 244), who argues that the verb *rûa'*, Hi., depicts military cries and cries of jubilation.

Is there no king with you. The noun *mèlèk,* "king, ruler," is ambiguous in this clause. It could refer to an earthly king, for instance from the dynasty of David, who could have given direction and comfort in difficult times but failed to do so. However, it could also refer to a heavenly king (van der Woude 1976, 151–52). In that case, the line expresses prophetic astonishment about the people's absence of trust in divine guidance. The direct context does not offer a clue regarding which of the two options should be preferred.

or has your counselor perished. The noun, or rather participle, *yô'ēṣ,* carries a comparable ambiguity. Traditionally, the word is used for counselors at court (e.g., in 2 Sam 15:12, Isa 1:26, 2 Chr 25:16). In Job 3:14, the noun stands parallel to *mèlèk,* "king, ruler." One of the throne names of the "prince of peace" in Isa 9:5 is *pèlè' yô'ēṣ,* "wondrous counselor," which would indicate that there is a lack of trust in the counsel of YHWH in this moment of history (van der Woude 1976, 151–52; De Moor 2020, 237).

that pain has gripped you like a woman in labor. The Hi. of the verb *ḥāzaq,* normally meaning "to make strong, strengthen," here has the meaning "to grasp, grip," indicating that negative emotions have overwhelmed the people (see also Jer 6:2.4). The basic meaning of the noun *ḥîl* is "pain." The qualifier "like a woman in labor" specifies the character of the pain. The woman's labor pains almost universally lead to outbursts and cries. In the Hebrew Bible, this experience often stands metaphorically for the harsh times before the emergence of a new era (see, e.g., Isa 13:8, 26:17–18; Nah 2:10) and for hardship in general (Stol 2000, 139; Bergmann 2008, 109–11). In Mic 4:9d the outbursts of women, like the cries in 4:9a, almost have the dimension of a mourning cry regarding the absence of a guiding king.

4:10. *Writhe and burst forth, daughter of Zion*. It is strange to invite a woman who is about to give birth to "be in pain, writhe" (Waltke 2007, 241). I therefore take the imperative as an invitation to the people to continue on the path of pain and not to flee the impending sorrow. The proposal by Bordreuil (1971, 25–27) to derive the word *ḥûlî* from the verb *ḥûl,* "to dance," should be abandoned, since it makes no sense (Kessler 1999, 202).

The word *gōḥî* is to be construed as a feminine singular imperative of the verb *gîaḥ,* "to burst out." In Job 38:8, this verb is used for the powerful event at creation when the waters of the sea burst out from the womb of the earth. In Mic 4:10, it stands metaphorically for the act of weeping too many tears. Therefore, there is no need to change the word into *ge'î,* "howl" (Mays 1976, 104).

like a woman in labor. With the two imperatives, the inhabitants of Jerusalem are encouraged to endure the harsh situation. The deeper reason for this is given in the next few clauses.

For now you have to leave the city. The verb *yāṣā'* is used here in its transitive meaning "to go out from, leave." The jussive makes it almost a command (Shaw 1993, 128). Instead of the usual noun for "town," *'îr,* the less frequent *qiryāh* is used. This noun, attested some thirty times in the Hebrew Bible and well known as an element in city names like Kiriath-Jearim, is a dialectal secondary form, probably northern, that reminds one of the Aramaic *qryh,* "town" (see Dreyer 1971), now also attested in the

Aramaic text in the Demotic script papyrus Amherst 63 (vi:2, ix:14, xi:9, xii:9, xvii:18, xviii:5).

settle in a field. The verb *šākan,* "to dwell, settle," is used elsewhere to describe the symbolic presence of YHWH at the mountain, in Jerusalem, or in the temple (e.g., Exod 25:8; 1 Kgs 6:13; Isa 8:18; Ps 68:17, 19). Here, Israel is summoned to settle elsewhere, indicating the temporary end of the relationship between God and his people. The noun *śādèh,* "field," functions as an antonym to "city." This opposition underscores the character of the impending change. The Judaeans have to leave their urban comfort zone and live outside the city, working the soil.

and come to Babylon. At first sight, the presence of the city name *bābèl,* "Babylon," seems to be an anachronism in the Neo-Assyrian period. Many scholars consider either the expression "and go to Babylon" or the whole verse as a later addition from the era of Nebuchadnezzar (for instance Sellin 1922, 284–87; Hillers 1984, 59; McKane 1998, 134–43; Kessler 1999, 207; De Moor 2020, 238). Some assume an original "Assyria" that was changed into "Babylon" in the exilic age (Alfaro 1989). This is an understandable reflex in view of the great importance of the Babylonian exile for the history and theology of ancient Israel. Few scholars assume that Micah was able to prophecy about a distant future (Waltke 2007, 243; Dempster 2017, 135–36). Dalley (2005) assumes that Babylon was a pseudonym for Nineveh.

As already indicated in the Introduction to this section above, I argue against these views with three remarks. (1) It should be noted that at the end of the eighth century BCE Babylon under Merodakh-baladan was a rising power and for many years a rival to the Assyrians. (2) Although there is no evidence for the presence of Israelite exiles in Babylonia during Assyrian domination, it is a fact that after 722 BCE the Assyrians populated their new province Samerina with people from Babylonian cities and hamlets (2 Kgs 17:24; see Rudolph 1975, 87; Becking 1992; Jenson 2008, 151). In view of the Assyrian policy to populate conquered areas with people from areas to which people from conquered areas were exiled, it is at least a possibility that Israelites, and maybe Judaeans, were exiled to Babylonia (van der Woude 1976, 156–57). (3) It should be kept in mind that Mic 4:10 is a poetic and prophetic text that applies the imagery of reversal and should not be used easily as primary historical evidence. In addition, both the Assyrians and the Babylonians deported exiles to rural areas in Mesopotamia to help increase agricultural production for the growing population in their realms (Becking 1992; Alstola 2019).

There, you will be saved! The adverb *šām,* "there," referring to Babel, stresses the inevitability of the exile as a stage on the road to salvation. The Ni. of the verb *nāṣal* has the connotation of "to be delivered." The verb is used to refer to the liberation of a person or a group out of an oppressive situation by a (divine) helper. In this clause, neither the character of doom is elaborated nor the identity of the helper revealed. The use of the *passivum divinum* invites readers to make up their own minds as regards the identity of the helping agent.

There, YHWH will redeem you from the hand of your enemies! The verb *gā'al,* "to redeem," stands parallel to the verb *nāṣal,* "to be delivered." Redemption, too, is an act of delivering someone from the bonds of captivity into a new life of freedom (Dijkstra 1999). The presence of the verb *gā'al* in Isaiah 40–55 has given rise to the idea that Mic

4:10 should be seen as a postexilic addition to the Micah corpus by a redactor who applied Deutero-Isaianic terminology (Sellin 1922, 285–87). However, the presence of *gā'al* in clearly preexilic texts (for instance Exod 15:13, Deut 19:12, Hos 13:14, Ps 72:14, Ruth 3:4) indicates that this verb and the idea of divine redemption were already known before the catastrophe. By implication, the verse could have been written around 700 BCE. The use of YHWH as the subject of this verb solves the riddle of the foregoing *passivum divinum*.

The adverbial adjunct "from the hand of your enemies" clearly defines the character of the dire situation. God's people will be freed from the powerful hands of their oppressors, even those described earlier in this verse (De Bruin 2020, 326–27).

Comments

Micah 4:8–10 almost depicts, exemplarily, the two-staged futurology of Micah 2–5. It summons the inhabitants of Jerusalem to accept and endure sorrow and pain as a divine punishment leading to exile. From this forced migration, they will eventually be redeemed by YHWH, resulting in a new life in Jerusalem under the rulership of a king, as of old. The author applies both ends of the "woman in labor" metaphor: her pain describes the despair of Judah, and her giving birth, the new future (Claassens 2018, 228–32). The metaphor indicates support during the period of despair, since the outcome will be joyful.

This double movement challenges the human inclination to avoid or ease pain and despair as much as possible, since many people are afraid of nuisance and hindrance. This is understandable and sometimes necessary, but it deprives a person of the full joy of a new beginning.

A Reversal of Fates (4:11–14)

4 [11]Now, many nations are gathered around you
who are saying:
"Let her be defiled!
Let our eyes gaze on Zion!"
[12]However, they do not realize the considerations of YHWH.
They do not fathom his counsel.
He will collect them like grain on a threshing floor.
[13]Arise and tread, daughter of Zion,
for I will give you a horn of iron
and I will give you hoofs of bronze,
that you may pulverize many nations,
devote their profit to YHWH
and their wealth to the lord of all earth.
[14]Now, lacerate yourself, daughter of a troop.
He has laid a siege against us.
With a rod they will strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.

Introduction

Micah 4:11–14 consists of three parts. Enveloped by two depictions of a siege of Zion (vv. 11–12, 14) stands a prophecy of doom for the beleaguering nations (v. 13). This pulverization of many nations will lead to a reversal in the fate of Zion. Verse 12, also in descriptive language, can be read as a hinge between the framework and the middle part. This verse describes the considerations of YHWH that will lead to a summons for Zion to liberate itself.

The section continues themes from the previous parts of Micah 4: change, peace, and an end to sorrow. Yet it conceals the element of exile—the first transformation—and presents the deliverance from sorrow as a military act of the daughter of Zion.

These two differences from the previous material in the book can be explained in different ways. (1) The author of 4:11–13 is of a different opinion from the author of the rest of Micah 2–5. Thus, by implication, the section is construed as coming from a different hand. Some scholars attribute 4:11–13 to an exilic/postexilic redactor (Sellin 1922, 285–87; Wellhausen 1963, 145; McKane 1998, 134–43; Kessler 1999, 208–16; Wagenaar 2001a, 287–89). Others see in these verses a reaction of the pseudo-prophets challenging Micah's view that salvation can be reached only after the dark tunnel of despair and exile (van der Woude 1976, 158–59). (2) The author of 4:11–14 accepts the two-stage futurology of Micah 2–5 but adds the notion that the exiled Judaeans will deliver themselves from their captivity. (3) A minority of scholars accepts the view that the kernel of the section is authentic while the other parts should be seen as a later addition (Deissler 1986, v. 11 + vv. 12–13; De Moor 2015, 193; De Moor 2020, 243–44: v. 13b is an addition). I opt for the second position since the reversal of fates is not presented as the result of human deliberation and strategy but of divine grace.

The place and function of 4:14 (ET 5:1) in the composition of Micah 2–5 is unclear and much discussed. Van der Woude (1976, 163–72) argues that 4:14 is part of 4:14–5:3 (see also Kessler 1999, 217–30; Waltke 2007, 261–319; De Moor 2020, 222–27). In that view, a nice opposition between the wounded leader of Israel and the coming redeemer is constructed. This view has old roots. In medieval times, various editors of both the LXX and Vulgate interpreted 4:14 as part of 5:1ff., as is reflected in their numbering of chapter and verse. The translations from the age of the Reformation adopted this view. Some scholars, however, construe 4:11–14 as a unit (e.g., Renaud 1977, 254–79; Smith-Christopher 2015, 155–65). Hillers (1984, 62–63), on the other hand, understood 4:14 to be an independent fragment with no clear connections to its context (see also McKane 1998, 143–45; Runions 2001, 157–58; De Moor 2002b; note that in De Moor 2020, 222–27, he changed his mind by construing 4:14 as forming a canticle with 5:1). Wagenaar (2001a, 278–87) construes 4:14 as part of a unit, 4:9–10 + verse 14, added by an early exilic redactor. Problematic to these views is the presence of a *setûmah* after verse 14, which indicates that the Masoretes were aware of a tradition that construed verse 14 as part of the previous section or at least apart from 5:1–3—supported by the demarcation in some older manuscripts of the LXX (De Moor 2002b; 2017, 149). When adopting that delimitation, the section 4:10–14 turns out to be characterized by a concentric symmetry (see, however, the slightly different view of Cuffey 2015, 233–38):

A	4:11–12	Nations laying siege before Zion
B	4:13a	Summons to thresh the enemy
X	4:13b	Prophecy of doom for the nations
B^1	4:14a	Summons to thresh the enemy
A^1	4:14b	Nations laying siege before Zion

Notes

4:11. *Now, many nations are gathered around you*. The adverb *'attāh,* "now," refers to the time of the author. At various instances in the Hebrew Bible, the collocation *we'attāh* has the function of introducing a new section or a new thought, as in English, "next,

thereupon" (see for instance Gen 3:22, 11:6, 20:7; Hos 2:9; Amos 7:16; Dan 11:2). At Mic 4:11, *we* has an adversative function, evoking a contrast between the then present situation and the impending redemption (see Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §40.2.1d). The words "many nations" begin to formulate the description of the siege with language from Mic 4:1b–2a.

who are saying. Above, I argued that both Micah 4 and Isaiah 2 refer to an ancient anthem, albeit in a modified manner (see the Introduction to "Peace: A Panorama"). The assumed anthem contained the elements retracing land and city from culture to nature, nations passing by the ruins of Zion, and a call for preparation for war. Micah 4:11 clearly refers to such a song.

Let her be defiled! The assumed ancient hymn contained the elements of mocking words from the mouth of "the nations" (Jer 22:8–9; see Lundbom 2004, 121–27; Mastnjak 2016, 207–10). Here, this element takes the form of an incitement to the self. The nations summon themselves to action. The reader might expect here a verb from the semantic field of destruction. The devastation of the capital city of an unfaithful ally was generally the military aim of the Neo-Assyrian campaigns. The verb *ḥānap,* "to be polluted, defiled," evokes a different emotion. In the eyes of the inhabitants of Zion, destruction of the temple would eliminate and finalize the temple's sanctity. Devastation would mean an end to its function as a Yahwistic sanctuary since it had been trampled by the boots of warriors (van der Woude 1976, 160; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 452–53; Wagenaar 2001a, 157; Smith-Christopher 2015, 156). Note the noun *śeôn,* "sandal, (military) boot," in Isa 9:4.

The LXX renders with *epicharoúmetha,* "we shall rejoice," most probably with malicious joy, or Schadenfreude (see Glenny 2015, 105). Since this form is not easily construed as a rendering of Hebrew *tḥnp,* scholars have sought ways to improve the Hebrew text. Robinson and Horst (1964, 142) emended to **nśmḥ,* "we shall rejoice." Some scholars suggest a different vocalization: *tāḥānap,* "she shall be paganized" (e.g., Haupt 1910, 218). Driver (1938, 267) reads a Ni. and renders "may she be ruthlessly treated." Other scholars turn to a different verb: *tissāḥēp,* "let her be thrown down" (Wellhausen 1963, 145), or *tēḥāśēp,* "let her be stripped" (Sellin 1922, 287). None of these proposals is convincing (see also Hillers 1984, 60).

Let our eyes gaze on Zion! The eyes of the beleaguering nations are referred to. According to various scholars, the pairing of the grammatical plural *ʿênênû,* "our eyes," and the singular verb *taḥaz,* "will gaze," is incoherent (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 453). This "problem"—already detected by the LXX, which rendered with a plural verb (*epófontai*), and the Vulgate, which has a singular for the subject (*oculus noster*)—can easily be solved by construing *ʿênênû* as a collective that is grammatically singular.

The idiomatic expression *ḥāzāh be,* "to look at," here has a depreciative connotation, hence, "to look down on, despise, treat with disregard" (De Moor 2020, 240). The suggestion by Andersen and Freedman (2000, 453) that *ḥāzāh* could be an Aramaic loanword used here to evoke the idea that this is a quotation from the enemy is fanciful and overlooks the fact that this verb belongs to an archaic stratum of Hebrew with roots in the Amorite language. The defiled Temple Mount will be a place to look upon in contempt.

4:12. *However, they do not realize the considerations of YHWH*. This *wāw* has a disjunctive function (see Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §39.2.2). It places the considerations of the nations in opposition to the thoughts of YHWH.

The verb *yādāh,* "to know," has in this context the connotation of "to realize, be aware of." Obsessed with their own pursuit of conquest, the nations do not reckon with the future that YHWH has in mind.

The idea that YHWH would have *maḥšabôt,* "thoughts, considerations," implies an anthropomorphic image of God. In the Hebrew Bible, God is imagined not only as having a human form—with feet, hands, head, etc.—but also as having emotions and ideas comparable to those of human beings. In the Hebrew Bible, men and women are seen as gifted with "thoughts." Almost always, these thoughts are negative and evil (see for instance Gen 6:5; Isa 55:7, 59:7, 65:2; Jer 4:14; 6:19; 11:19; 18:12, 18; 49:30; Ezek 38:10; Ps 33:10). There is only one exception: in 1 Chr 29:18, David prays that God may keep the good thoughts in the hearts of his people. Although "human thoughts" are the model for the idea of "divine thoughts," the Hebrew Bible observes a qualitative difference between them, as articulated by Deutero-Isaiah: "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' declares YHWH" (Isa 55:8). God's thoughts are seldom directed against Israel (see, e.g., Jer 18:11). In many instances, the divine thoughts are those of redemption for Israel (Jer 19:11, 50:45, 51:29; Ps 40:6). The outcome of YHWH's thoughts is unclear in Pss 33:11 and 92:6. As in Jer 50:45 and 51:29, the effect of God's thoughts will be benign for Israel, but at the expense of the "nations."

They do not fathom his counsel. The verb *bîn,* "to fathom," stands parallel to the verb *yādāh,* "to know," but refers to a deeper kind of knowledge. The Hebrew verb *bîn,* "to understand, to fathom," has connections with the world of wisdom. This means that the nations are unable to see through the fabric of creation and perceive the divine design and God's intentions.

Since the noun *ʿēṣāh* stands parallel to *maḥšabôt,* "thoughts, considerations," it must be construed as an attestation of *ʿēṣāh* I, "counsel, deliberation, decision." The divine counsel occurs a few times in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the book of Isaiah. God's plans for the future are almost always benign for Israel (De Moor 2020, 240).

He will collect them like grain on a threshing floor. With the application of an agricultural metaphor, God's intention for the nations is made clear. The verb form *qibbeṣ ām,* "he gathers them," should be construed as an indication of an act in the impending future (*perfectum propheticum*) and not as a description of something that already happened. The clause explains the character of God's intentions for the nations and stands in contrast to the way God will gather the dispersed of Israel in the future. At the threshing floor, corn is disarticulated and grain is separated from the chaff (Hopkins 1985, 225–26). In others words, the beleaguering nations will soon be crushed.

4:13. *Arise and tread, daughter of Zion*. The inhabitants of Jerusalem are summoned to play their role in the act of crushing the nations. This should be seen as the people taking an active role in their own liberation and as actions supplemental to the divine acts of deliverance.

for I will give you a horn of iron. As can be deduced from Deut 25:5, oxen were apparently used in the process of threshing grain (see Hopkins 1985, 225–26). As a component of the imagery of treading the enemy, the inhabitants of Jerusalem are seen metaphorically as a treading animal equipped with an iron horn (De Moor 2020, 241).

This *qèrèn,* "horn," should not be seen as the horn found on the head of many animals but as the work of a blacksmith on the feet of the animal, as becomes clear from the parallel with the hoofs of bronze. The iron implement will help to focus the power of the animal on the work of threshing and will lead to a better result.

and I will give you hoofs of bronze. The feet of the metaphoric animal will be shoed with bronze, giving extra power.

that you may pulverize many nations. The *wāw* here has resultative force indicating the aim of the empowerment of the feet with metal implements. The verb *dāqaq,* "to crush, pulverize," is used a few times in the Hebrew Bible as a synonym for *dûš,* "to thresh," with agricultural products as objects (Exod 30:36; Isa 28:18, 41:15). More often, it is used to described the act of destroying cultic images (e.g., Asherah, 2 Kgs 23:6; an image, 2 Chr 34:6, 7; see also 2 Chr 15:16). The imagery is applied to describe the destruction of enemies (2 Sam 22:43, Ps 18:43, Mic 4:13). This implies that the "nations" will be smashed to pieces without anything remaining. This ardent image is not easily combined with the more peaceful future for the nations envisioned elsewhere in Micah 2–5.

devote their profit to YHWH. The verb *ḥāram* means in the Hi. "to devote to the ban." In the ancient Near East, the spoils of war were supposed to be devoted to the deity in order to avoid plunder or personal profit and to restore order amidst chaos (Stern 1991; as in the Mesha stele, *KAI* 181:14–17). On the other hand, this custom had a devastating effect on subdued people (Smith-Christopher 2015, 161). The 3.m.p. suffix in *biṣʿām,* "their profit, gain," should be construed as referring to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Their individual and collective gain acquired during the crushing of the nations should to be dedicated to YHWH.

and their wealth to the lord of all earth. The basic meaning of the noun *ḥayîl* is "power, strength." At various instances, the derivative meaning "wealth" is to be preferred. In Mic 4:13, the parallelism with *biṣʿām*, "their profit, gain," hints in this direction. Here, the 3.m.p. suffix refers to the wealth of the nations.

The epithet "lord of all earth"—occurring six times in the Hebrew Bible and once in the sixth-century BCE Khirbet beit Lei cave inscription (*CoS* 2.53; Paas 2003, 49)—underscores the universal character of YHWH. He is seen not only as the local deity of Zion, but as the ruler of the whole world. This implies that even the nations should accept his rule.

4:14. *Now, lacerate yourself, daughter of a troop.* Basically, there are two ways to construe the verbal form *titgōdedî:* as Hitp. imperfect feminine singular of either the verb *gdd* I, "to gather in a troop," or the verb *gdd* II, "to lacerate oneself." Both actions would be an appropriate reaction to the threat of the nations. In view of the presence of the noun *gĕdûd,* "troop," in the description of the addressed person, the first possibility is generally accepted. The verb *gdd* II, however, can be read as an indication of a mourning rite (see, e.g., 1 Kgs 18:28, Jer 16:6; with Fensham 1980, 235; A. R. Davis 2013, 128–29; Olyan 2004, 111–15). I therefore adopt the view of De Moor (2020, 244) that a pun on the root *gdd* is intended. The daughter of Zion is summoned to accept the impending disaster by enacting a mourning rite.

The expression "daughter of a troop" is a variant of the address "daughter Zion" (see Notes to 1:13) prompted by the direct context. As such, it reminds the inhabitants of Jerusalem of their status and role within the divine war.

He has laid a siege against us. The noun *māṣôr* has a variety of meanings (see *DCH* 5:449–50). In this context, the translation "siege" is to be preferred (with De Moor 2020, 244). In Deut 28:53, 55 and Jer 19:9 the noun is parallel to the assonant *māṣôq,* "distress," indicating that a siege could lead to a situation of distress in which people are forced "to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters." This situation is comparable to that in Mic 3:2–3.

With a rod they will strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. The noun *šèbèṭ* could refer to the scepter of a king as well as to the staff of a shepherd.

The verbal form *yakkû* is plural, while the form *śām,* "he lays," is in the singular. Both words would have the same subject. There is no need to neutralize the incoherency by changing the number of one of the two verb forms. With *śām,* the enemy is construed as a collective.

The noun *šopēṭ,* "judge," is assonant with *šèbèṭ*. Gevirtz (1980) has unconvincingly argued that the noun *šèbèṭ* could mean "judge" too (see De Robert 1971). Though the words are not synonymous, the author chose to name the "leader, ruler of Israel *šopēṭ*" for poetic reasons to express an antimonarchic attitude (De Moor 2015, 195).

Since Biblical Hebrew is a body-part language, the "cheek, jawbone" could be construed as an equivalent of the possessive pronoun (thus Andersen and Freedman 2000, 461). The act of hitting someone on the jaw could better be seen, however, as a condescending act (see 1 Kgs 22:14, 2 Chr 18:23; Smith-Christopher 2015, 163). Animals were (and are) hit on their cheeks to make them obedient. De Moor (2015, 195) construes this impending act as a reference to 2 Kgs 15:30: "Then Hoshea son of Elah conspired against Pekah son of Remaliah. He attacked and assassinated him, and then succeeded him as king in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah" (NIV). De Moor takes this as an argument for his view that the core of Mic 4:9–5:14 should be connected to the events of the Syro-Ephraimite War.

Comments

A different yet complementary side of God's redemption is depicted in Mic 4:11–14. The reversal of the fate of the inhabitants of Zion will also have a more military character. This deliverance from siege will be the outcome of God's deliberations. The inhabitants of Zion, however, will be instrumental in the process since they are summoned to trample the "nations" like wheat on a threshing floor (Lewis 2020, 471). According to the rules of holy war, they must dedicate the spoils of war to God and not keep them for their own advantage or personal benefit.

An Unexpected Ruler (5:1–5)

5

[1]And you, Bethlehem in Ephratah,
    insignificant among the clans of Judah,
from you will go out on my behalf
    one who will be a ruler over Israel,
one whose origins are of old
    from ancient times.
[2]Therefore, he will abandon them
    until the time that she who has to bear has given birth.
The remainder of his brothers will return
    to the children of Israel.
[3]He will stand.
    He will shepherd
in the strength of YHWH,
    in the majesty of the name of YHWH, his God.
They shall dwell,
    because then he will be great unto the ends of the earth.
[4]There will be peace!
If Assur enters our land
    and treads on our citadels,
we will raise against him seven breakers
    and eight human biters.
[5]They will crush the land of Assur with a sword,
    the land of Nimrud in its entrances.
He will deliver from Assur
    when it comes to our land
        and treads on our boundaries.

Introduction

The *setumah* after verse 5 indicates that 5:4–5 should be read together with 5:1–3 (*pace* Kessler 1999, 230–39; van der Woude 1976, 163–76; Hillers 1984, 64–67; Wagenaar 2001a, 290–300; Gignilliat 2019, 182). Willis (1968b) argues that 4:14–5:5 is a literary unit. Taking it as a unit implies that the subsection on the liberation from Assur (5:4–5) should be read as the effect of the birth of the ruler from olden days. The section thus contains two correlated elements: verses 1–3, the promise of the birth of a child in Bethlehem, and verses 4–5, the promise of a military victory over Assur. In my view, both elements were written by the author of Micah 2–5. Van der Woude (1976, 172–76) assumes 5:4–5 voices the optimistic ideas of the opponents. Since these verses continue the theme of Judah as instrumental in its own deliverance, a theme already present in 4:11–14, there is no reason not to assign them to the author of Micah 2–5.

De Moor (2015, 193–94; 2020, 222–27) has observed that the final two lines of verse 1 are separated in several ancient manuscripts and interprets this fact as an indication that the lines contain a later addition. Verse 2 has often been construed as a later prose addition set between two poetic verses (for instance by Renaud 1977, 300–303). In addition, many scholars assume a change of subject—from "the ruler" in verse 1 to YHWH in verse 2, which would support the idea of redactional activity here. Van der Woude (1976, 169), however, has convincingly argued against this view. I agree with him that verse 2 is not purely prose and that a change of subject does not necessarily mark the hand of another writer.

Various scholars construe verses 4b–5a as a later addition (Sellin 1922, 289–90; Renaud 1977, 306–12). It should be noted, however, that verses 4b–5 can be read as an incantation should Assur enter the land. Various scholars have noted parallels between Mic 5:4b–5 and the following Ugaritic incantation (Gordon 1991; Wagenaar 2001a, 180, 294–300; unconvincingly challenged by Smith-Christopher 2015, 171–76; De Moor 2020, 255, does not construe an incantation here; only the apotropaic idiom is used in his view):

> When a stalwart attacks your gate(s),
> a warrior your walls,
> your eyes to Baal lift up (saying):
> O Baal, will you not drive the stalwart from our gate(s),
> the warrior from our walls?
> A bull, O Baal, will we consecrate,
> a vow, Baal, will we fulfil,
> a male (animal), Baal, will we consecrate,
> a *ḥitpu*-sacrifice, Baal, will we fulfil.
> A feast for Baal will we proclaim,
> to the sanctuary of Baal, will we climb,
> (on) the path of Baal's temple will we walk.
> And Baal will hear your entreaty.
> He will drive the stalwart from your gate(s),
> the warrior from your walls.
>
> (*KTU* 1.119: 26–36; Watson 1996)

Accepting this section as an incantation reinforces the coherence within Mic 5:1–5 since it underscores the redemptive actions of the coming ruler.

In the Gospel of Mathew (2:6), it is narrated that when the magi come to King Herod to worship the newborn king of Israel, Herod, eager not to lose his position, asks the chief priests and the scribes of the Jews where the Messiah is assumed to have been born. In their answer they give a combined quotation of Mic 5:1 and 2 Sam 5:2. The character of the quotation has been analyzed by Menken (2004, 254–63), who arrives at two important conclusions: (1) the Greek text in the Gospel is a translation of the MT of Micah independent of the LXX version; and (2) the translations probably belonged to pre-Matthean traditions. With this combined quotation, the evangelist appropriated the texts into a messianic discourse. Neither the MT nor the LXX endows the forthcoming ruler with messianic features. In the pesher on Micah from Qumran (1Q14 = 1QpMic; DJD I, 77–80; Sinclair 1983), Micah 5 is absent. The scroll from Naḥal Ḥever (8ḤevXIIGr; Barthélemy 1963, 170–78) contains Mic 5:1. The text is certainly not messianic, as is the traditional Christian interpretation of it (see Hillers 1984, 67; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 468; Waltke 2007, 261–305; Dempster 2017, 148–50; Gignilliat 2019, 177–81). In short, the promise should be read in its historical context (Kessler 1999, 229–30). The reading of Mic 5:1 as a prediction of the birth of Jesus is an early Christian invention (see Roukema 2019, 128–36, for the interpretation of this verse by the church fathers; De Moor 2020, 219–21).

The optimistic tone of this unit has given rise to the idea that it must be seen as a later addition (Wellhausen 1963, 145–46; Wagenaar 2001a, 290–300) or as the words of Micah's opponents (van der Woude 1969). In my view, the second horizon of the futurology of Micah 2–5 is described here.

Notes

5:1. *And you, Bethlehem in Ephratah*. This section starts with a contrasting *wāw* indicating a change of view (Kessler 1999, 222–23; Waltke 2007, 265–66; Cruz 2016, 208; Gignilliat 2019, 173). The author changes his attention from Zion and the city of Jerusalem to the village of Bethlehem. For reasons that will become clear, this place is now addressed.

In the Hebrew Bible, two villages are named *bêt-lèḥèm,* "Bethlehem." Joshua 19:15 refers to a Bethlehem in Zebulun, 15 kilometers west of Nazareth. All forty other attestations refer to a little town south of Jerusalem, hence the qualifier here "in Ephratah," referring to the area around Bethlehem (Gen 35:16, 18; 48:7 [two times]; Ps 132:6; Ruth 4:11). The roots of the family of David are to be found in Bethlehem (1 Sam 16). In Micah 5, Bethlehem stands for a trustworthy new beginning, in contrast to the morally polluted town of Jerusalem. Popular etymology explains the name as "House of Bread," taking *lèḥèm* to mean "bread." The author of the book of Ruth was familiar with this idea. However, the element *lèḥèm* could also be connected to the root *lāḥam,* "to make war." Besides, it should be noted that in the ancient Levant many toponyms have the structure of *bêt* + the name of a deity (see for instance *bêt'ēl,* "Beth-El, house of El"; *bêt' dāgôn,* "Beth-Dagon, house of Dagan"). Arguing along this line, the element *lèḥèm* would refer to a divine being. Honigmann (1933) suggested a connection with

the Mesopotamian deity Laḫmu, a sea monster mentioned in the creation myth *Enuma Elish* as an offspring of the primordial pair Apsu and Tiamat. However, a connection between Bethlehem and this deity is unlikely, in view of the great distance in space and mythology. Since many other toponyms have the structure of *bêt* + a common noun, a connection with "bread" or "war" seems more likely. The element *lèḥèm* could be construed, however, as an epithet for a warrior god (De Moor 2018, 12, 21; 2020, 246).

It has been suggested that the topographical name Bethlehem already occurs in the Amarna correspondence (fourteenth century BCE). Cazelles (*ABD* 1, 712) suggested that *Bit*-NIN.URTA, "house of Ninurta," in EA 290:16 could be read as Bit-Laḫama. The topographical name refers to "a town belonging to Jerusalem" (EA 290:14–16), but the identification is uncertain. Koch (2106) has suggested that the toponym be read as Bīt-Baʿal and understands it as referring to Baalah/Kiriath-Jearim and hence, not to Bethlehem. In 2012, a bulla was uncovered in Jerusalem with the following probable reading: "In the seventh [(year) / Beʾ]thlehem / [to the kin]g" (Reich 2012; see De Moor 2020, 247). It is difficult to draw any conclusion on the basis of this Iron Age bulla. The reading "Bethlehem" for [. . .]*ytlḥm* is far from certain. In addition, the inscription does not have the literary structure of a fiscal bulla (contra Reich 2012). The conclusion that the city of Bethlehem had to pay some kind of tax to the court in Jerusalem in the eighth to seventh centuries BCE goes beyond the evidence (contra Reich 2012; De Moor 2020, 247).

insignificant among the clans of Judah. The adjective *ṣāʿîr,* "small, insignificant," denotes the humbleness of Bethlehem both in size and in political power. The word constructs an antagonism with the seemingly important city of Jerusalem.

The noun *ʾèlèp* does not refer here to "cattle" or "thousand" (thus Andersen and Freedman 2000, 466) but to a tribal unit the size of an extended family (Mays 1976, 116; Hillers 1984, 65–66; Bendor 1996, 94–97; Kessler 1999, 223; Jenson 2008, 157; De Moor 2020, 247–48, renders with "thousands" but interprets the noun as referring to Judaean clans). The clan at Bethlehem is seen as one of the most unimportant ones in the whole of Judah, implying that nothing great or specific could be expected of it.

from you will go out on my behalf. As in Exod 21:22, the verb *yāṣāʾ,* "to go out," should be seen here as referring to the birth process—the child coming out of its mother's womb (Gignilliat 2019, 175–76; De Moor 2020, 247). The preposition *le* has beneficial force indicating on whose behalf the child will be born (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §11.2.10d; Waltke 2007, 270). The first-person suffix apparently refers to God. This was a reason for Sellin (1922, 289) to see *lî* as a later gloss, since, according to him, God is referred to elsewhere in Micah in the third person. This argument is not convincing (Hillers 1984, 64–65).

one who will be a ruler over Israel. The author applies the verb *māšal,* "to rule," to the future role of the coming child. The same verb occurs in Ps 8:7, which gives testimony to the view that humankind is created to be "master over the works of God's hands." This implies that humankind is thought to be a steward of or over God's creation. Hence, human rule should be caring and protecting. The forthcoming "ruler" will by implication not be despotic or an abuser of power. His rule will be for the benefit of humankind and creation. In the book of Judges, Gideon declines the offer of becoming king over Israel with the statement that only YHWH will rule over his people (Judg 8:23). This view could lead to the assumption that the newborn child

from Bethlehem will be a divine ruler, which later gave rise to the messianic interpretation of the verse.

one whose origins are of old / from ancient times. These words continue the theme from 4:8: "the former rule, / the kingship over the daughter of Jerusalem." Since the clause fits the context, there are no compelling reasons to interpret it as a later addition (contra De Moor 2020, 249). Here too, the proto-apocalyptic view of history as an interchange of good times and bad times is in the background. The "origins" do not refer to a paradise-like period at the beginning of time (contra Sellin 1922, 289; Mays 1976, 116–17; Renaud 1977, 314–22; Hillers 1984, 66) nor to the return of the kingship—and the last king—as it was before the disaster. The ruler will be like a judge from the early days of Israel when there was an unbroken relationship with YHWH, as suggested by tradition (Smith-Christopher 2015, 166).

5:2. *Therefore, he will abandon them*. The identity of the subject is unclear and cannot logically or syntactically be deduced from the context (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 468–69). Two interpretations are possible. (1) It is God who abandons his people for a short time; but then the expression "his brothers" is awkward, since YHWH is nowhere seen as having siblings. (2) The new ruler will leave his people alone; but that collides with the fact that in the narrative order he is as yet unborn. I propose to see God as the subject and to construe the 3.m.s. suffix in "his brothers" as referring to the ruler.

The verb *nātan,* generally "to give," has in this context the connotation of "to give away, abandon, let alone" (Kessler 1999, 115; De Moor 2020, 250). In this context, the verb speaks of the exile, which is seen as an act of abandonment by God.

until the time that she who has to bear has given birth. The process of pregnancy and birth stands as a metaphor for the period of exile. This should not be taken literally as if the exile would last no more than nine months. The hard times in exile are compared with the pains of a woman in labor, and childbirth is seen as the beginning of a new era. Here the two-staged futurology of Micah 2–5 is expressed in beautiful poetic language.

The remainder of his brothers will return. The noun *yètèr,* "remainder," is a synonym of *še'ērît,* "remnant," used elsewhere in Micah (2:12; 4:7; 5:7, 8) to express the same idea of a group of survivors of the exile (see Gerleman 1974a). Therefore, the interpretation of Sellin (1922, 289; also see Hillers 1984, 67; De Moor 2020, 250–52) that *yètèr 'èḥāyw* refers to a royal title, "the one who surpasses his brothers" (see also Gen 49:3), should be abandoned. The use of the expression *yètèr 'èḥāyw* for those in exile indicates a connection of fellowship and solidarity between the two groups of Judaeans despite the fact of abandonment.

The verb *šûb,* "to return," is standard terminology for the return from exile (Holladay 1958: 144–47; Hillers 1984, 66). The verb is used as an antonym to the abandonment earlier in the verse.

to the children of Israel. This phrase indicates the direction of the forthcoming return from exile.

5:3. *He will stand*. At first sight, standing seems to be a superficial and unspecific act for a ruler. "To stand and to shepherd" might be a hendiadys: "he will shepherd standing," referring to pastoral customs (De Moor 2020, 253). I would prefer, however, a more metaphorical interpretation. In the Hebrew Bible, the verb *'āmad* can be used in the sense of "to stand for service." In 1 Sam 16:21–22, the verb is used to describe the service of David to Saul; in Jer 52:12, it is used for the service of Nebuzaradan to the

king of Babylon. By implication, the ruler in Micah 5 will loyally serve his God and his people.

He will shepherd. The LXX adds *'opsetai,* "he will see, take care," probably based on an error of hearing (*r'h* instead of *r'h;* see De Moor 2020, 252). It is typical of the royal ideology of the ancient Near East to cast a king in the role of a shepherd (Hunziker-Rodewald 2001, 43–72; Wagner-Durand 2020). The idea is based on the transfer of the image of the caring shepherd to the relationship of worldly rulers to their subordinates. In the Hebrew Bible, David is presented, despite his many moral trespasses, as the almost ideal shepherd. Long before David and Micah, the Sumerian king Shulgi (late third millennium BCE) said of himself, "I am a shepherd; a pastor of the black-headed (people)" (Self-Praise of Shulgi = Shulgi A:1–6; see Klein 1981, 5–123; Vacín 2010). In the Coronation Hymn for Ashurbanipal, the following is said of the newly installed king:

> Place in his hand the weapon of war and battle,
> give him the black-headed people,
> that he may rule as their shepherd!
>
> (SAA 3.11: Rev.17–18; *CoS* 1.142)

One of the important qualities of Cyrus the Great that made Marduk choose him as king over the world is that "he shepherded with justice and righteousness all the black-headed people" (Cyrus Cylinder 13; *CoS* 2.124).

in the strength of YHWH. The future ruler will not act on his own behalf or strive for only personal benefit. He will be endowed with power by God. This empowerment will have two sides. On the one hand, the idea is in line with the ancient Near Eastern royal ideology that supposes divine power supporting the deeds of earthly kings. On the other hand, the power will be deployed for beneficial acts, as is made clear by the context.

in the majesty of the name of YHWH, his God. The noun *gā'ôn* means "pride, exaltation, majesty." Around 700 BCE, the Deuteronomistic "name theology," in which the "name of the Lord" is used to avoid an all too realistic view of YHWH, started to develop. In Mic 5:3, the word "name" stands parallel to "the strength of God" and denotes the divine honor (van der Woude 1976, 171). The qualifier "his God" indicates a strong connection between the coming ruler and YHWH. The ruler is presented as fully embedded in and empowered by the Israelite divinity.

they shall dwell. The third-person plural apparently refers to those who will return from the exile. The verb *yāšab,* "to dwell," assonant with the verb *šûb,* "to return," in 5:2 refers to a safe and undisturbed life in Judah.

because then he will be great unto the ends of the earth. There are two possibilities for the identification of the subject: YHWH and the new ruler, with a preference for the new ruler. The verb *gādal,* "to be great," probably chosen in view of its assonance with *gā'ôn,* "pride, exaltation, majesty," should not be seen as a reference to the bodily dimensions of the ruler but as an expression of his importance on the world stage. His realm will not be restricted to the local area around Jerusalem. This greatness is the outcome of divine guidance.

The adverb *'attāh,* generally "now," can at times refer to a moment in the future (*DCH* 6:635). A translation with "then" is more appropriate than "now," however, since

the greatness of the ruler will be manifest only in future times (see Mays 1976, 111; van der Woude 1976, 171–72; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 469; contra R. L. Smith 1984, 43).

5:4. *There will be peace!* Traditionally, this verse is rendered with "And he will be peace" or the like (LXX, Vulgate, KJV). However, this translation does not make much sense since peace is a situation and not an attribute or a quality of a person. Hence, paraphrasing translations are offered, such as "He will be the One of peace" (Cathcart 1968; Shaw 1993, 130; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 472; De Bruin 2020, 327; De Moor 2015, 194, construes the words as a later addition; De Moor 2020, 254, uses "peace-maker"). In these translations, *zèh* is construed as a predicative demonstrative pronoun, "this one, he" (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §17.1). On rare occasions, however, *zèh* can have the function of an unspecific adverb of place, "there." On this basis, I come to my assumption that *zèh* has as its antecedent "the ends of the world." This implies that the deeds and doings of the ruler to be born in Bethlehem will lead to a situation of worldwide peace (on the concept of *šālôm,* see Notes at 3:5). R. L. Smith (1984, 44–45) argues that "this" points forward to the acts described in verses 4b–5.

If Assur enters our land. The name Assur stands in prolepsis to the conditional clause further introduced by *kî,* "when" (Allen 1976, 339; Hillers 1984, 68; Gordon 1991; Wagenaar 2001a, 181–82; De Moor 2020, 255). The toponym is metonymic for the invading Assyrian armies. An identification with a specific Assyrian campaign to the Levant goes beyond the imaginative language of Micah 5 (see Kessler 1999, 235).

The parallel with the verb *dārak*, "to tread" (see the following note), indicates that *bô'* here refers to an unfriendly form of "coming."

and treads on our citadels. The verb *dārak,* "to tread," evokes the image of a giant warrior whose feet crush the relatively powerless Judaean fortresses, destroying everyone who could have defended Jerusalem and Zion. In view of the mighty power of Assyria and the evidence of destruction it left in the Levant, this was a real fear for the inhabitants of the minor states in Canaan, Israel, and Philistia. There is no need to change *'armĕnōtênû,* "our citadels," into *'admātênû,* "our land" (with Sellin 1922, 285; Cathcart 1968, 513; Renaud 1977, 298; Williamson 1997, 365–67; Jenson 2008, 160; contra Haupt 1910, 236; Wellhausen 1963, 146; Willi-Plein 1971, 95; Hillers 1984, 68; Jeremias 2007, 179).

we will raise against him seven breakers. The first-person plural form *wahaqēmônû,* "we will raise," is abrasive; the reader would expect "he will raise," with the coming ruler as subject. The MT is supported only by the Vulgate: *suscitabimus,* "we will stir up." The LXX renders the verb in a passive voice: *epegerthèsontai,* "they (the seven shepherds) will be aroused over him," leaving the identity of the formal subject unclear. The proposal by Wellhausen (1963, 146) to read *hqwm,* "he will raise up," has often been adopted (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 477–78). Although this proposal relieves difficulties in the text, making YHWH/the ruler the subject of all liberating acts in 5:1–5, it does not account for the Hebrew text (see Wagenaar 2001a, 183). I therefore suggest that the "we" be construed as a reference to (parts of) the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who, guided by the forthcoming ruler, will draw a line in the sand against the invading Assyrians.

The defense will come from seven people. The noun *ro'ēh,* traditionally rendered "shepherd" (e.g., De Moor 2020, 256), is used here metaphorically, indicating that the warriors will shield the inhabitants of Jerusalem like a shepherd his flock. The

suggestion to vocalize **rāʿîm,* "evil spirits" (Wagenaar 2001a, 184), would fit within the interpretation that 5:4b–5 contains an incantation. The text would then refer to seven demons, like the *sibitti* that are fought in Akkadian incantations. However, the plural for *rāʿāh,* "evil one," would be *rāʿôt*. I therefore propose to render with a form of the verb *rāʿāh* V, "to break" (*DCH* 7:521).

eight human biters. The word *nāsîk* is a rare term for "prince." In the Hebrew Bible, this noun has a slight mythological undertone. Judges 16:21, Ps 83:12, and Ezek 32:30 speak of archetypical warriors who oppose inimical forces. The same thing can be found in Sir 16:7, where the "princes" stand equal to the "giants" (van der Ploeg 1950, 57; Goff 2010). This would imply that Jerusalem will be defended against Assyria by robust warriors who remember the days that once were. Wagenaar (2001a, 184–85) correctly argued that the word *nāsîk* should be seen as derived from the root *nāšak,* "to bite." This is supported by the LXX *dègmata ʾathroopoon,* "stings of people" (see Glenny 2015, 119–21). The "breakers" and "biters" will be the helpers of the coming ruler in his quarrel with the Assyrians. In the context of Micah 5, the benevolent side of them is dominant over their malevolent side (see Wagenaar 2001a, 301–3; Korpel and De Moor 2014, 50).

The author of Micah 2–5 applies the form of the numerical saying *x*/*x* + 1 to these lines. This form has its background in didactic wisdom, as in the book of Proverbs, and is used to help the reader understand the point. It is uncertain whether or not exact numbers are meant. I opt for the view that in this connection the numerical saying functions as an indication of totality (see Roth 1962; Cathcart 1968; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 479; De Moor 2020, 256).

5:5. *They will crush the land of Assur with a sword*. The subjects of the act of crushing are the shepherds and princes mentioned in the previous verse. Traditionally, the word *rāʿû* is construed as a form of the verb *rāʿāh* I, "to shepherd" (LXX, Vulgate; Weiser 1949, 244; Renaud 1977, 285; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 472; Jenson 2008, 160; Smith-Christopher 2015, 174; De Moor 2020, 256) or "to rule" (Hillers 1984, 68; McKane 1998, 164). This rendering clearly follows the theme of the "seven shepherds," but with the adverbial adjunct "with a sword" it produces an odd sentence. I therefore follow the suggestion that the word *rāʿû* is to be construed as a form of the verb *rāʿāh* V // *rāʿāʿ* II, "to break, crush," which makes sense in the context: the act is a military operation (see also Job 24:21; with Gordis 1978, 270; Wagenaar 2001a, 186; *DCH* 7:521; Runions 2001, 161–63, ponders this idea but chooses "to shepherd"). The same verb was used in the previous verse. The noun seems to have been deliberately chosen for its assonance with the seven shepherds.

the land of Assur. The toponym *ʾaššûr* refers to the Neo-Assyrian Empire that controlled the ancient Near East from around 750 to 612 BCE. There are no reasons to construe "the land of" as an insertion since the Greek scroll from Naḥal Ḥever (8ḤevXIIGr) contains these words that are absent in the LXX (contra Hillers 1984, 68).

with a sword. A sword (*ḥèrèb*) was a military implement that had a negative, destructive connotation (see Gabriel and Gichon 2003; Notes at Mic 4:3).

the land of Nimrud in its entrances. In the Hebrew Bible, Nimrud is presented as a heroic hunter from the olden days (Gen 10:8–9, 1 Chr 1:10). In the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Nimrud was the second capital. The city is better known under its Akkadian name Kalḫu (see Hebrew *kālaḥ,* Gen 10:11–12; Oates and Oates 2001). Excavations

have brought to light the fact that various inhabitants from the conquered Northern Kingdom were exiled to Nimrud (Becking 1992, 79–82; Sano 2020, 11–22). Memories of such forced migration might be in the background of Mic 5:5. Nimrud is mentioned in parallel to Assur.

The noun *pètaḥ* refers to all sorts of openings: of the mouth, of a cave, of a city, etc. In this verse, its meaning is "entrance to a country." Conquering or occupying the gateways implies full military control over the country. Many scholars change the MT into *bapetûḥāh,* "with the dagger," thus creating a parallelism with "sword" (Willi-Plein 1971, 95; Mays 1976, 118; Renaud 1977, 300; Hillers 1984, 68–69; Shaw 1993, 130; McKane 1998, 164); however, this is not supported by the ancient versions (Glenny 2015, 121; De Moor 2020, 257).

He will deliver from Assur. The author plays with the 3.m.s. referents. The "he" in this clause is the coming ruler who will liberate the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The verb *nāṣal,* Hi., "to deliver, rescue," occurs frequently in the Hebrew Bible. On many occasions, the form refers to a divine deliverance from evil or occupation (e.g., Gen 32:12, Exod 18, Judg 6:9, 2 Kgs 18:30–35). In slightly fewer cases, it refers to humans who rescue other humans from evil. Although the coming ruler is acting on behalf of YHWH, the foreseen deliverance from Assur will be a human act. The line is silent about the person or people who will be delivered from Assur. The context makes it clear that "we" will be delivered. There is no need to supply the verb with a 1.c.p. suffix (Wagenaar 2001a, 108).

when it comes to our land. This line forms an *inclusio* with the second line of verse 4. The 3.m.s. pronoun refers to Assyria

and treads on our boundaries. *Inclusio* with the third line of verse 4. The repetition of the theme of an Assyrian campaign to Jerusalem underscores the unavoidable character of such an invasion.

Comments

Micah 5:1–5 contains the connected themes of war and peace. On the one hand, a fierce Assyrian invasion is foreseen. In view of the prophetic character of the discourse, it is impossible to connect this coming of Assur to one of the known Assyrian historical campaigns against Judah. On the other hand, the Assyrian invasion will not be the final word of history. As a sign of hope, a child will be born unexpectedly in the seemingly insignificant town of Bethlehem. The significance of this background of the new ruler is to be found in a contrast between Jerusalem standing as a symbol of an economically self-enriching elite and Bethlehem signifying the traditional clan-based economy.

Later, this child will become a liberating ruler who will crush the Assyrians and bring world peace. The section has often been read as a messianic text and a prediction of the birth of Jesus. Such readings are possible only in hindsight after the events described in the New Testament. Micah 5:1–5 does not endow the coming ruler with messianic characteristics. There are no traces of appointing by anointing in this text; it should be read in its own historical context. The newborn savior will have restricted power, since it is YHWH alone who will save and deliver his people (Goswell 2019). Once again, the author applies both ends of the "woman in labor" metaphor: her pain

describes the despair of Judah, and her giving birth, the new future (Claassens 2018, 228–32). The second part of the unit indicates that a potential Assyrian invasion will be countered by military forces.

Deliverance from disaster and despair often comes from an unexpected corner. Like a mustard seed, the seemingly insignificant and modest have the inherent potential to surpass the wealthy and powerful.

Good and Bad in One (5:6–8)

5 [6]The remainder of Jacob will be in the midst of great nations
like dew from YHWH,
like abundant rain on vegetation
that does not wait for a man,
or await humankind.
[7]The remainder of Jacob will be in the midst of great nations,
will be like a lion among the animals of the forest,
like a young lion among flocks of sheep,
that when he passes by tramples
and devours with no one to deliver.
[8]You will raise your hand against your adversaries
and all your enemies will be cut off.

Introduction

A *petucha* after verse 8 indicates that the Masoretes construed Mic 5:6–8 as a unit (this division is supported by Mur 88; see De Moor 2017, 150). This view has been both adopted (Hillers 1984, 70–71; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 482–87) and rejected. Van der Woude (1976, 176–83) reads 5:6 as a prophecy by Micah, while in his view 5:7–8 is part of a textual unit uttered by the opponents (5:7–14). The setting, aside from verse 6, is prompted by the fact that the role of the "remainder of Jacob" changes between verses 6 and 7. A benign role in relation to the nations (v. 6) will shift to that of an adversary (vv. 7–8). As I show below, these two roles can be reconciled at a conceptual level. According to Wellhausen (1963, 146), the optimistic tone of the section suggests that it is a late insertion (also Sellin 1922, 291–92; Wagenaar 2001a, 301–5). This conceptual coherence takes away any ground to consider 5:8 a late addition (contra Renaud 1977, 338–39). The suggestion that 5:14 had its original place after 5:6–8 (De Moor 2020,

222–27) is not supported by the ancient versions. The contents of the verse fit better after 5:13 (see below).

Notes

5:6. *The remainder of Jacob*. On the idea of *šĕ'ērît,* "remnant, remainder, rest," see NOTES at 2:12.

will be in the midst of great nations. Those who will survive in exile will find themselves amid *'ammîm rabbîm,* "great nations." The phrase refers back to the theme of the nations in Micah 2–5 in which the nations are cast in various roles: inimical conquerors, seekers of YHWH, and people to be subdued. In 5:6, the exiles are placed in the midst of them—as a result of conquest—to prepare the reader for a different role in verses 7–8: these people will be abased militarily by the remnant of Jacob.

like dew from YHWH. The meteorological phenomenon of *ṭal,* "dew," refers to such things as fine rain and mist that occurs after sunrise (Futato 2001). In the ancient Near East, this prerequisite for growing crops was seen as a divine gift. In Ugaritic mythology, Ṭallay, a daughter of Baal, was seen as deified dew (see *KTU* 1.3 i: 24 and other texts). Isaiah 26:19 contains the notion that dew was caused by the stars (see also the Baal Cycle, *KTU* 1.3 ii: 38–40). In the Hebrew Bible, "dew" is not deified but is seen as a gift of YHWH. In the dry climate of ancient Israel/Palestine, water supply was vital for agriculture. Hence, morning dew was more than welcome, especially during months without rain (Hopkins 1985, 98–99). The presence of the offspring of the exiles is compared to this benign phenomenon. As dew was necessary for new agricultural life, so the remnant of Jacob will bring a new future for the great nations.

like abundant rain on vegetation. The plural *tantum rebîbîm* refers to a mild form of sprinkling rain or drizzle (De Moor 2020, 259). The noun occasionally stands parallel to *ṭal* (Deut 32:2; see Ugaritic Epic of Baal, *KTU* 1.3 ii: 38–40 = *CoS* 1, 86; Aqhat story, *KTU* 1.19 i: 44–45). This drizzle too was seen as a divine blessing for the growth of vegetation (see also 4Q509: Fr. 3.6; De Moor 2020, 259). Similarly, the remainder of Jacob will be instrumental for a better world.

that does not wait for a man, / or await humankind. This clause is a subordinated clause. The main exegetical problem is the question of the antecedent of the relative pronoun *'ašèr,* "that." Who, or what, is not waiting? Most scholars construe the dew and the rain as the referent but have problems explaining the connection (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 485–86). Van der Woude (1976, 178) opts for a different solution. He remarks that *qāwāh,* Pi., "to wait," is always constructed with a human subject in the Hebrew Bible. By implication, he argues that the remnant of Jacob should be the subject of the verb. He interprets the clause as suggesting the idea that the remnant of Jacob does not have to wait for other nations to join them in their new role at this stage of history. There are two problems with this view of van der Woude. In the next verse, which is composed in parallel, the relative pronoun *'ăšèr* refers directly to the preceding noun "lion." Second, his interpretation is slightly artificial. In my view, dew and rain form the antecedent, and the element of comparison is as follows: morning dew and early rain do not wait for the presence of a farmer before moistening the dry acres. In a similar way, the offspring of Jacob will perform their task.

5:7. *like a lion among the animals of the forest*. The noun *'aryēh* is a generic term for "lion." In the ancient Near East, and in the Hebrew Bible, a lion was a metaphor for the divine as well as for kings. The element of strength communicated the power of the deity or the ruler (Strawn 2005; Smith-Christopher 2015, 179). This motif is already present in one of the hymns of the Sumerian king Shulgi:

> I am the king, I am the wild bull of extraordinary vigour,
> I am the lion with wide-open mouth.
> (Shulgi hymn C 1–2; Castellino 1972, 248)

The role of the lion among the other animals is at first not specified in Micah 5.

like a young lion among flocks of sheep. A *kĕpîr,* "young lion," is the offspring of the *'aryēh* that is already capable of killing its prey (Strawn 2005, 304–11). The antonym *ṣō'n,* "sheep, flock," hints at the role of the lion since, in various traditions, lions are seen as carrying off lambs from the flock to devour them (e.g., 1 Sam 17:34). The lion simile is complementary to the dew simile (Hillers 1984, 71).

that when he passes by tramples. The particle *'im,* "if, when," introduces a subordinate conditional clause (van Leeuwen 1973; Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §31.6.1). This implies that the author announces that the lion, when passing by, will trample and devour with no one saved.

and devours with no one to deliver. The image from the animal kingdom must have been familiar to the readers of Micah 2–5. Like these lions, the offspring of Jacob will make an end of their enemies.

5:8. *You will raise your hand against your adversaries*. The verbal form *tārôm* could be construed either as a 2.m.s. or 3.f.s. verbal form. In the second case, the pronoun "she" would refer to the noun *šĕ'ērît,* "remainder," which is grammatically feminine. The fact that the three nouns in the verse—"hand," "adversary," and "enemy"—all have a 2.m.s. suffix should be seen as an indication that the form *tārôm* is to be construed as 2.m.s. The imperfect has imperative force. On the basis of the two roles of the offspring of Jacob, the "you" is invited to go into action. In my view, this "you" character is formed by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who are the audience of the speaker.

The phrase *rûm yād,* "to raise a hand," is an expression of superiority and power over someone else (Deut 32:27, Isa 26:11; Jenson 2008, 162; De Moor 2020, 262). In Mic 5:8, this position is reinforced by the preposition *'al,* "against," indicating that the offspring of Jacob will use their power against inimical forces. The noun *ṣār,* "adversary, foe," qualifies the Assyrians as people who cause distress to others by narrowing their existence.

all your enemies will be cut off. The verb *kārat,* "to conclude (a covenant), cut," has in its second meaning an element of destruction. As a farmer can cut off a sprig from a tree, so an army can destroy branches of an enemy (see, e.g., Jer 6:6, 46:23, 50:16). The image evoked is that of the enemy of Jerusalem being cut off from its vital elements.

Comments

At a superficial level, Micah 5:6–8 seems to be strange in view of its combination of the benign imagery of dew and refreshing rain with the malign metaphor of the devouring lion. This view, however, is based on a one-dimensional reading of texts. The two

images may be combined through taking into account the variety of objects of the acts of "dew" and "lion." Dew will give new life to Israel, while at the same time the lion will destroy Jerusalem's enemies. Wagenaar (2001a, 301–5) mentions a line in Proverbs where the images of "dew" and "lion" stand in parallelism: "A king's rage is like the roar of a lion, / but his favor is like dew on the grass" (Prov 19:12). He then argues that the similes in Mic 5:6–7 "complement each other in an antithetical way" (Wagenaar 2001a, 303; see also Hillers 1984, 71). Divine ambiguity is also present in the Egyptian Book of the Dead: "He is Horus with Two heads, one (the falcon-head of Horus) bears Truth, the other (the head of Seth) falsehood: He gives falsehood to him who practices it, and truth to him who comes bearing it" (Book of the Dead XVII; see De Moor 2020, 259). These observations support the idea of Mays (1976, 121) and Wolff (1982, 130) that Mic 5:6–7 forms a coherent whole. I would like to go one step farther. At a conceptual level, both metaphors are benign and can be combined into the idea that the destruction of the enemy will lead to salvation for Jerusalem and return from exile.

Two-Sided Extermination (5:9–14)

5 [9]It will happen on that day—oracle of YHWH—
That I will cut off your horses from your midst
and will destroy your chariots.
[10]I will cut off the cities from your land
and demolish your fortifications.
[11]I will cut off the sorceries from your hand,
and you will have no soothsayers.
[12]I will cut off the graven images and the standing stones from your midst,
and you will no longer bow down to the creation of your hands.
[13]I will pull out the sacred poles from your midst
and exterminate your cities.
[14]But I will take vengeance in anger and fury
on the nations who did not listen.

Introduction

This enigmatic text of Micah 5:9–14 has been much debated. The debates center around three questions: (1) Is the unit original or an addition by a later redactor? (2) What is its connection with the preceding section? (3) Who is referred to by the 2.m.s. pronominal suffixes: Israel or its enemies? Diverging answers to these questions have led to a variety of opinions among scholars.

According to Jeremias (1971), Mic 5:9–14 is not original to the book of Micah (see also Frevel 1995, 472–87; McKane 1998, 169–76). He argues that nowhere else does Micah address an anonymous "you"; the text would be the only oracle of doom in the book of Micah without a preceding accusation; and the language and style in the section differ from those of the rest of the book.

Van der Woude (1976, 178–82) adopted this view but turned it into an argument for the allotment of 5:7–14 to Micah's optimistic opponents. In doing so, he interprets

the 2.m.s. pronominal suffixes as referring to Israel's enemies. Some scholars accept the view that 5:9–14 are authentic (Hillers 1984, 72–74; Jeppesen 1984a; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 489–91); others assign them to exilic or postexilic redactors (Willi-Plein 1971, 95–97; Wagenaar 2001a, 305–15). Of interest is the connection that can be made with Isa 2:6–8:

> You, YHWH, have abandoned your people,
> the descendants of Jacob.
> They are full of divination from the East;
> they are sorcerers like the Philistines
> and embrace foreign customs.
> Their land is full of silver and gold;
> there is no end to their treasures.
> Their land is full of horses;
> there is no end to their chariots.
> Their land is full of idols;
> they bow down to the work of their hands,
> to what their fingers have made.

Various words occur both in Mic 5:9–13 and in Isa 2:6–8: the verb *ʿānan,* "to soothsay"; the nouns *sûs* // *mèrkābāh,* "horse // chariot"; and the expression *maʿăśēh yādayim,* "the work of the hands." In addition, both texts hint at the trespasses of the people of Judah, although not in exactly the same vocabulary. These affinities are interpreted by some as an indication that Mic 5:9–13 is dependent on Isa 2:6–8. Although this conclusion is not convincing—the parallels are only partial and some differences can be noted—it is not, if the sections could be connected, a strong enough argument for the inauthenticity of Mic 5:9–13 (as proposed by De Moor 2015, 195; 2020, 263–68; cf. Zimran 2020, who considers the two texts to be in dialogue).

In my view, the argument of Jeremias (1971) that we should assume a common redactor are not strong enough. The author of Micah 2–5 sometimes addresses an unspecified "you" for rhetorical reasons. The mention of a series of trespasses within the unit functions as an accusation. Various words in this section have a parallel in the rest of Micah 2–5. From the perspective of genre, 5:9–13 is clearly an example of the extermination formula (*Bannformel;* see Wagenaar 2001a, 305–15). The "you" character can only be construed as referring to the inhabitants of Judah since for the enemies of Zion, the cultic trespasses mentioned could not have been acts of sin. The section has two main topics:

1. Mic 5:9–10 are directed toward military elements defending against an invading enemy.
2. Mic 5:11–12 target various forms of illicit and misleading cultic activities that were supposed to offer comfort in times of trouble.

The concluding verse 13 contains both themes. With verse 14, the author switches his attention and addresses the "nations" (see also Waltke 2007, 319–42). This reading mirrors the two-stage futurology I detected in Micah 2–5. In the near future, doom will befall Judah, but in the far future, its enemies will be destroyed. Therefore, 5:14 should not be construed as a late addition (contra Renaud 1977, 345–47).

Notes

5:9. *It will happen on that day—oracle of YHWH—*. As in 2:4, the expression *bayyôm hahû',* "on that day," refers to the first moment of change when Judah will be punished for its transgressions. As in 4:6, the expression *nĕ'ūm YHWH,* "utterance/oracle of YHWH," claims a divine origin for the contents of the following verses.

That I will cut off your horses from your midst. The verb *kārat,* "to cut off," continues the theme of destruction of verse 8 but is now directed against Judah. The collocation *sûs* // *mèrkābāh,* "horse" // "chariot," refers to instruments of devastating power that rulers rely on; nevertheless, they often fail in the decisive battle. The story of the exodus in which the horses and chariots of Pharaoh stood helpless against the power of YHWH and were drowned in the sea is a characteristic example of this concept (Exod 14–15). In view of the literary context, the words "horse" // "chariot" could refer to items connected with an illicit form of the cult. Andersen and Freedman (2000, 491) refer to the removal by Josiah during his reform of the "horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun" (2 Kgs 23:11). I do not deny this possibility but point to two facts. (1) In Mic 5:9–13 two different groups of items are said to be soon cut off—military objects (vv. 9–10) and illicit cultic objects/people (vv. 11–13). They share the incorrect trust that the Judaeans had put in them. (2) Andersen and Freedman (2000, 491) correctly argue that the cutting off of the horses forms a parallel, albeit a partial one, with the transformation of the implements of war in 4:3, implying that the horses' main assignment was military.

and will destroy your chariots. The verb *'ābad* has, in the Hi., the connotation of "to destroy, put an end to." This implies that the chariots, on which the leaders depended for the defense against foreign invaders, will be exterminated and therefore useless. It is only in 5:9 that this verb has "chariots" as its object.

5:10. *I will cut off the cities from your land*. For an agricultural society like ancient Judah, *'ārîm,* "cities," were places of escape and refuge in times of sorrow. The villages and hamlets in the countryside were often not well defended. The inhabitants could flee to a walled city when an enemy entered the land.

and demolish your fortifications. The verb *hāras* is used in the Hebrew Bible for the act of "tearing down." Quite often, buildings are destroyed—a house, a city, a stronghold, a tower—but the verb is also used to describe the demolishing of humans—Israel (Jer 24:6), wicked people (Ps 28:5). Micah 5:10 clearly refers to the impending destruction of defensive buildings.

A different word for "fortress" is used than in 5:4. A *mibṣār* was part of a ring of fortifications around a greater city that was supposed to keep an enemy at a distance. The loss of such a fortification would make that city more vulnerable.

5:11. *I will cut off the sorceries from your hand*. Sorcery (*kĕšèp*) is a form of manipulative magic that seeks to influence the course of a person's life or the history of a community by means of supernatural powers. In the Hebrew Bible, sorcery is a forbidden activity and generally is described in derogatory language (see for instance Jezebel in 2 Kgs 9:22, or the Assyrian queen in Nah 3:4). Since sorcerers offer misguided comfort, they will be cast out of Judah.

and you will have no soothsayers. The verb *'ānan,* "to soothsay," is used here in the form of a plural participle: "soothsayers." Since the verb is seen as related to the noun

ʿānān, "cloud," it has been suggested that a form of brontomancy, divination by thunder, might be referred to (Hurowitz 1997, 418). Another possibility has been proposed by Tropper (1989, 237–38, 265), who suggested that the soothsayers were informed about the future through necromancy. Given the sparse evidence in the Hebrew Bible, it is difficult to reconstruct with any certainty the means by which the soothsayers operated. It is clear, however, that the practice was seen as illicit by the authors of the H (Holiness Code) and D (Deuteronomist) traditions in the Pentateuch (for instance Lev 19:26 and Deut 18:14). In the eyes of the author of Micah 2–5, soothsayers were offering a misleading source of certainty about the future.

5:12. *I will cut off the graven images and the standing stones from your midst*. A *pèsèl* was an image carved in wood or stone that represented a deity. The making of such an image and the reverence for it were seen as faulty forms of Yahwism (e.g., Exod 20:4). Although ancient Israelite religion was supposed to be aniconic, in reality images were almost everywhere (Mettinger 1995; Judge 2019).

A *maṣṣēbāh,* "standing stone," was often a cultic representation of a deified ancestor (Mettinger 1995; De Moor 2020, 265; Lewis 2020, 169–96). Although they were seen as illegitimate from a Yahwistic point of view, here and in Deuteronomy, standing stones have been found frequently in archaeological excavations in Israel/Palestine. In addition, the Hebrew Bible occasionally speaks of them without criticism (e.g., Gen 28, Exod 24, 2 Sam 18). To the author of Micah 2–5, these stones were undesired connection points with the divine realm.

you will no longer bow down to the creation of your hands. The destruction of graven images and standing stones signifies the end of their cultic function. The verb *ḥāwāh* in the *histaphal* refers to illicit forms of veneration. The verb is used in the ban on images in the Decalogue. The expression *maʿaśēh yādayim,* "the work of the hands," disqualifies the images as mere manmade objects without any divine essence.

5:13. *I will pull out the sacred poles from your midst*. The author shifts from the verb *kārat,* "to cut off," used four times, to the verb *nātaš,* "to pluck up, uproot." This verb has its context in the world of agriculture, where it depicts the act of removing trees and plants (see, e.g., Jer 1:10, Sir 3:9). Metaphorically, it can denote the uprooting of a population (for instance at Deut 29:27, Jer 12:7).

The noun *ʾašērāh* can refer to the *dea nutrix* Asherah—the consort of YHWH in preexilic religion—or to her cultic symbol in the form of a pole (Day 2002, 42–67) and not the name of a deity (*pace* Frevel 1995, 472). The plural in this verse is an indication that the poles are meant. There was a growing tendency in ancient Israelite religion to judge the veneration of these poles as illicit. Besides the challenge they posed to the aniconic code, the cult of the sacred poles was seen as a form of distrust in YHWH (Jeppesen 1984a; Frevel 1995, 472–87).

and exterminate your cities. The verb *šāmad,* "to exterminate," indicates the act of making something useless through destruction. See Notes at 5:10 for the city as a safe haven in troublesome times. The proposal to read **ʿaṣabbèkāh,* "your idols" (Robinson and Horst 1964, 144; Renaud 1977, 344; McKane 1998, 176), fits the context since it is a nice parallel to "sacred poles," but it overlooks the defensive role of cities. The same holds for the suggestion to construe *ʿārêkāh* as "your bay laurel," based on Ugaritic *ġr* and Arabic *ġār*, "bay laurel." The thickets of this shrub are presumed to have surrounded the images of Asherah, which would provide a nice parallelism (De Moor

2020, 266–68). Note that *ʿārâw* in Isa 42:11 is sometimes construed as "tamarisk" (*DCH* 6:546).

5:14. *But I will take vengeance in anger and fury*. The *wāw copulativum* here has contradictory force. The taking of revenge is often seen as contrary to the image of YHWH as a peaceful god. The verb *nāqam* refers to acts that restore the broken relationships within a community (R. L. Smith 1984, 49; Peels 1995; Jeremias 2007, 194–95). In the Hebrew Bible, divine vengeance is provoked because God does not tolerate the fact that situations have become as they are. YHWH seeks revenge when Israel trespasses the moral code of the relationship (see Lev 26:14–17, 2 Kgs 9:7, Isa 1:24, Jer 59:28, Ezek 24:8, Ps 99:8). However, the divine revenge also could be directed against Israel's enemies (Num 31:1–3, Deut 32:35–43). This idea is based on the fact that the enemies infringed upon the existence of Israel (e.g., Nah 1:2, Jer 46:10). In Mic 5:14, God's vengeance is directed against the invading armies. The connected acts of liberation are presented as part of the second stage of the futurology of Micah 2–5.

Biblical Hebrew knows ten different words for "wrath." They often occur in alternating parallelisms, and their specific meanings are difficult to distinguish. Divine wrath is often a reaction by YHWH to Israel's trespassing of the moral code (see for instance Lev 26:28, Deut 9:19, Jer 4:4, Ezek 5:15). On the other hand, divine wrath is seen as directed against the enemies of Israel when they threaten the existence of God's beloved (Isa 34:2; Jer 10:25; Ezek 25:14, 17; Nah 1:2). On occasion, divine wrath can lead to acts of doom (Fretheim 2002; Jeremias 2011).

on the nations who did not listen. Although the noun *gôy* in pre-Hellenistic times could refer to the people of Israel, it is clear that in this context the other nations are meant. In Deuteronomistic texts, Israel is frequently reproached for not listening to YHWH, his voice or his commandments (1 Kgs 20:36; 2 Kgs 14:1, 17:14, 18:12, 21:9). This use, however, is not exclusive. In 2 Kgs 17:40, the foreign colonists who were brought to the area of the former Northern Kingdom are charged in the same way. In Mic 5:14, other nations crossed the boundaries of their mandate given by God and are therefore subject to punishment. After being instrumental in the first stage of the futurology, the nations exceeded their assignment from God, heavily oppressing the Judaeans.

Comments

In this concluding section of Micah 2–5, the author once more utters his view on the future. Impending is the extermination of everything the inhabitants of Jerusalem relied on for their defense. It will turn out that military implements and illicit cult will leave Zion without defense (Jeremias 2007, 191–95). All elements that were seen as possible points of contact with the divine—images as well as religious specialists—will turn out to be of no value. The first commandment will be completely respected (Rudolph 1975, 103–5). In stating this, the author repeats elements previously mentioned in the text. In a final verse, the distant future is addressed. In a second stage of the future, the other nations will be subject to God's vengeance for overdoing the role they were given in the divine plan.

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PART III
A PRO-JOSIANIC TREATISE BASED ON PSEUDEPIGRAPHY (6–7)

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As suggested in the Introduction, Micah 6–7 can be read separately from Micah 1 and Micah 2–5. In my opinion, these two chapters were written shortly before the Josianic age. At that time, an anonymous author tried to appropriate the traditions associated with Micah at a time of incipient change, when Judah would soon become independent from Assyria. This change enabled a cultic reform, as reflected in the narrative of 2 Kings 23.

A Summons to the People (6:1–2)

6 [1]Hear now what YHWH is saying:
"Stand up, plead before the mountains
and let the hills hear your voice!"
[2]Hear, O mountains, the plea of YHWH
and the perennial foundations of the earth,
since there is a suit of YHWH
with his people
and with Israel he will dispute.

Introduction

Micah 6:1–2 summons the people to be involved in a legal process. The genre of this unit is not completely clear. Various scholars argue that Mic 6:1–8 should be read as a lawsuit (*Gerichtsrede;* Westermann 1964, 101, 143; 1991, 199; Harvey 1967, 54–61; Hillers 1984, 75–79; Cruz 2016, 121–64; Dempster 2017, 153–56), as an admonition (*Mahnrede;* Tångberg 1987, 57–61) or as a report on an imagined legal dispute (O'Brien 2015, 74). Smith-Christopher (2015, 188–92) correctly argued that 6:1–5 is an appropriation of an ancient literary form for a new situation. Van der Woude (1976, 200–205) has argued that this literary form is not well defined (see also Shaw 1993, 172–87; Gignilliat 2019, 174–207). In addition, he points out that this form is too constricting to account for Micah 6. He therefore reads 6:1–8 as the description of an imagined legal process. Micah 6:1–2 forms the opening scene of this process, in which Israel is invited to defend itself in front of elements of nature that function as witnesses.

Notes

6:1. *Hear now what YHWH is saying*. The people addressed by this plural imperative of entreaty (see Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §40.2.5) are not directly revealed. A singular

person is then summoned to "plead before the mountains"; therefore, he cannot be identified with the mountains addressed in 6:2. Waltke (2007, 342) proposed "the audience of Micah" as being addressed by the summons to hear, while Micah himself would be the addressee of the imperative to stand up.

Stand up, plead before the mountains. The verb *qûm,* "to arise," is used here in the sense of "to get ready." In view of the legal context, it could be translated with "take your position."

The verb *rîb* here has the connotation of "to plead" (*pace* Limburg 1969, 301; Kessler 1999, 257; with Nielsen 1978; De Roche 1983; Cruz 2016, 124–27). The as yet unknown participant in the legal process is invited to bring forward his arguments against the as yet not uttered accusation.

Various scholars propose changing the preposition *'èt* into *'èl,* "against." This emendation is based on the expression *rîb 'èl,* "to strive against," in Judg 21:22; Jer 2:39, 12:1; and Job 33:13 (Sellin 1922, 294; Limburg 1969, 301–2; Lescow 1972, 183; Tångberg 1987, 59–61; Jeremias 2007, 197). This reading makes the mountains the adversaries of Israel and is not supported by any of the ancient versions. I therefore uphold the MT, construing *'èt* as a preposition and seeing the mountains as witnesses to the process (with Rudolph 1975, 108–9; Jacobs 2001, 242–43; O'Brien 2015, 75; Cruz 2016, 127–28; De Moor 2020, 284; see Waltke and O'Connor, 1990: §11.2.4). In a Hittite treaty, the "mountains" are among the ten thousand divine witnesses (Tudḫaliya Treaty = *CTH* 96 = Beckman 1999, 114–24 = *CoS* 2.18): superfluity describes perfection.

Mountains, and hills, can have different roles in the Hebrew Bible. In Psalm 121, the mountains express threatening uncertainty during a pilgrimage. In many instances, mountains are referred to as the places where popular non-Yahwistic Canaanite cults were conducted (e.g., Deut 12:2, 1 Kgs 14:23, 2 Kgs 17:10, Hos 4:13; van der Woude 1976, 206). In Micah 6, the mountains, and the hills, are cast in the role of witnesses to the legal process. They are chosen for this role in view of their stability and incontrovertibility.

and let the hills hear your voice! In parallelism, the hills are assigned a comparable role. Hearing someone's voice is the first act of being a witness.

6:2. *Hear, O mountains, the plea of YHWH*. These words repeat verse 1.

and the perennial foundations of the earth. The plural adjective *'ētānîm,* "perennial, continuous," is placed before the noun *môsdîm,* "foundations," which is syntactically odd but not impossible in Biblical Hebrew (see Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §14). This observation, in connection with the absence of a verbal form in the clause, has led some scholars to the conclusion that a more original text read **ha'azînû,* "give ear to!" (Sellin 1922, 294; Wellhausen 1963, 25, 146; Willi-Plein 1971, 98; Mays 1976, 128) or "streams (from) the foundation of the earth" (Hillers 1984, 76). However, these emendations, although the first one has parallels in Deut 32:1 and Isa 1:2, are not supported by the ancient versions. Again, the MT should be maintained, the syntactical oddity should be accepted, and the imperative "hear!" should be seen as governing the second clause (van der Woude 1976, 206–7; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 516–17; Jacobs 2001, 248–49; Waltke 2007, 346–47; De Moor 2020, 285). As a builder lays the foundation of a building, YHWH laid the foundations of the earth (see Paas 2003, 69–73). These foundations are seen as strong and persistent and contrast with the ever-changing conduct of humans (Gignilliat 2019, 194).

since there is a suit of YHWH. The meaning of the word *rîb* has shifted slightly—from "plea" to "suit"—between verses 1 and 2 (see Harvey 1967; Nielsen 1978). In the third clause of verse 2, the noun refers to the disagreement between YHWH and Israel. The character of that quarrel is as yet not made clear.

with his people. The mentioning of *'ammô,* "his people," underscores the shift in focus to Judah.

and with Israel he will dispute. Here the dispute between YHWH and Israel is announced. The verb *yākaḥ* occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible in the Hitp., "to argue, dispute." The infinitive Hitp. is attested as a noun "controversy" (4QPs^{b} 76.10). The use of the Hitp. indicates a reciprocal dispute between YHWH and Israel (De Moor 2020, 285–86).

Comments

Micah 6:1–2 sets the stage on which a legal process will take place and introduces the main characters: (1) YHWH, who has a quarrel with Israel; (2) Israel, who apparently has transgressed the divine moral code, with details of this offense yet to be given; and (3) the steadfast mountains and the reliable foundations, who will act as witnesses. The reader is eager to know both the charges and the outcome.

A Lesson on the Past (6:3–5)

6 [3]"My people, what have I brought on you
and how did I weary you?
Answer me!
[4]For I have brought you up from the land of Egypt,
I have redeemed you out of the house of slaves.
I have sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.
[5]My people, remember
what Balak, the king of Moab, advised
and what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him.
From Shittim to Gilgal
in order to know the righteous acts of YHWH."

Introduction

Micah 6:3–5 is to be seen as a canticle connected to the units 6:1–2 and 6:7–8. The substantive cohesion of the three verses is corroborated by the delimiters in the ancient manuscripts (see De Moor 2005; 2020, 277–80). The unit contains the plea of YHWH. Instead of an accusation, as could have been expected, the unit presents a summary of the past. The lines resemble the Deuteronomistic view of the history of Israel with its dual emphasis on the goodness of God and the trespasses of "his people." The author invokes an idea implicitly: "God has been a good patron" (Ben Zvi 2000, 145), while Israel has not met divine expectations or fulfilled its own promises. God's patronage is apparent in this defense plea. This historical retrospective refers to three important traditions: (1) the exodus out of Egypt, (2) the inimical threat during the journey through the desert, and (3) the conquest of the Holy Land. Since 6:4–5a fits the context, there is no reason to see these verses as a later addition (contra De Moor 2020, 287).

Notes

6:3. *My people, what have I brought on you*. This is an unexpected beginning of the divine plea. The reader would expect that YHWH would address the judge presiding over the quarrel, not the other party. There is no ground to change *ʿammî,* "my people," to *ʿimmî,* "with me," and attach it to verse 2 (contra Mays 1976, 128). The word *ʿammî* contains an intriguing depiction of the relationship between God and the people. Despite their assumed trespasses, God still addresses them as "my" people. The divine election of Israel has not been undone by the people's acts in the past. There is a connection with Ps 22:2, where the complainant, despite his misery, still addresses YHWH as *ʾēlî,* "my God."

The clause, like the following one, is phrased as a rhetorical question already implying an accusation (Ramsey 1977, 50; Cruz 2016, 131–32) against which God will defend himself (Kessler 1999, 262–63).

The construction of the verb *ʿāśāh* with the preposition *lĕ* is ambiguous. It could be construed as elliptically expressing the idea "to cause someone to experience something good" (see Jer 29:32) as well as ". . . something bad" (van der Woude 1976, 209; see also Jer 42:10). In view of the parallel line "and how did I weary you?," the second possibility seems to be the most obvious. The character of the assumed divine wrongdoings, however, remains concealed. On the contrary, in verses 4–5, a set of divine acts of grace are narrated. The aim of the author is to persuade the audience that the acts of God that were perceived as aggravating and tiresome were in fact gracious.

how did I weary you? The verb *lāʾāh* in the Hi. is a perfect example of a causative: "to make tired, to weary" (see also Job 16:7; De Moor 2020, 286). YHWH asks his people regarding which burden deprived Israel of its powers to act.

Answer me! The summons to the people to answer him depicts YHWH as a God for whom the deeds of Israel, or the lack of them, are apparently incomprehensible. He does not understand the situation and wants to be informed: Tell me, what did I do wrong? Even before an answer could be given, the discourse takes a turn, with God informing the listeners how he had been a good patron.

6:4. *I have brought you up from the land of Egypt*. The verb *ʿālāh* in the Hi. is widely used in the Hebrew Bible to describe the process of bringing the people out of Egypt and into the promised land (Groß 1974). In Micah 6, the liberation from Egypt is seen as a defining act of divine grace for Israel (see Albertz 2001).

I have redeemed you out of the house of slaves. The verb *pādāh* has its origin in commercial contracts and legal documents. In that context, it signifies the act of "buying off for money" (Holst 2019). A clear example is, "Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you do not redeem it, you shall break its neck" (Exod 13:13). In Mic 6:4, the financial aspect has faded away and more stress is placed on the act of redemption. The expression *bêt ʿăbādîm,* "house of slaves," is a standard depiction of the situation of misery for the Hebrews in Egypt before the exodus (Exod 13:3, 14; 20:2; Deut 5:6, 6:12; Josh 24:17; Judg 6:8; Jer 34:13).

I have sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. The verb *šālaḥ,* "to send," with Moses and Aaron as objects, occurs in the historical section of the Deuteronomistic homilies set in the mouth of Joshua (Josh 24:5) and Samuel (1 Sam 12:8). Moses and Aaron are seen as sent with a task: to be instrumental as leaders of the process of libera-

tion. The mention of Miriam in Mic 6:4 indicates that she too was seen as an important figure in that process (see Exod 15; O'Brien 2015, 76–86).

6:5. *My people, remember*. See Notes at 6:3 for "my people." The suggestion to change *'ammî* to *'immô,* "with him," and construe this word as part of the final sentence in 6:4 (Weiser 1949, 277; Mays 1976, 128; Hillers 1984, 76) has no support in the ancient versions (McKane 1998, 182).

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the verb *zākar,* "to remember," is used to invite Israel, both individually and collectively, to remember YHWH as its ground of being (Pss 77:11, 106:7, 143:5). The verb does not refer to a simple act of "looking back" but is used to depict formative cultural memory in which the past functions as a moral device for the present (Ramsey 1977, 45; Assmann 2011). In Mic 6:5, the traditional pattern is slightly altered: here God is the one who summons Israel to remember (Smith-Christopher 2015, 191).

what Balak, the king of Moab, advised. The name of Balak refers to the story narrated in Numbers 22–24 about this Moabite leader, who sought the help of the seer Balaam in order to drive away the Israelites as they journeyed through the wilderness. If Balak had succeeded, Israel never would have reached the promised land. Some scholars suggest, without argument, that the qualifier "king of Moab" should be treated as an explanatory addition (Sellin 1922, 295; Mays 1976, 128; Robinson and Horst 1964, 144; Weiser 1949, 249). In my view, the author creates a tension between the sublime king, YHWH, and the all-too-earthly "king" Balak and their different agendas. The name Balak is perhaps attested also in line 31 of the Moabite Mesha Inscription (see Finkelstein, Na'aman, and Römer 2019).

and what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him. Balaam, the seer, is mentioned in Numbers 22–24 as the person who is hired to prophesy against the Israelites but who, after a dramatic scene with his she-ass, eventually blesses Israel. As a result, they could continue their journey through the wilderness (on Num 22–24; see, e.g., Schmidt 1979; Moyer 2012). The name Balaam also occurs in the plaster inscription from Deir 'Allā (Hoftijzer and van der Kooij 1976; *CoS* 2.27). It is unclear whether these texts refer to the same historical person or apply aspects of the memory of an ancient seer to different people (Dijkstra 1995). Some scholars suggest, without argument, that the qualifier "son of Beor" should be treated as a didactic addition (Sellin 1922, 295; Robinson and Horst 1964, 144; Mays 1976, 128). Others propose changing *bèn bĕʿôr,* "son of Beor," to *bĕʿobrekā,* "at your crossing," and construing the word as an adverbial adjunct to "from Shittim to Gilgal" (Weiser 1949, 249; Mays 1976, 128, 134). This emendation would make the Hebrew of the line more fluent but finds no support in the ancient versions (Waltke 2007, 354).

The mention of Balak and Balaam underscores God's guiding patronage during the journey through the wilderness. Even in moments of great despair and challenge, Israel was not left on its own.

From Shittim to Gilgal. The toponym *šiṭṭim,* "Shittim," refers to the last stopping place before the crossing of the Jordan (Num 25:1, Josh 3:1; see Kratz 2020). In an inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III, the city is named *a-bi-il šiṭ-ṭi,* "which is on the border of Bīt Ḫumri" (Na'aman 1995a). The city was later named Abila and Peraea and is currently called Abil-ez-Zeit. The toponym *gilgal,* "Gilgal," evokes the first dwelling place in the promised land after the crossing of the Jordan River (Josh 4:19). According to

biblical tradition, the circumcision of those males who were born after the exodus took place at that spot (Josh 5:2–5). In mentioning these two localities, the author summarizes the traditions associated with the "entering of the land," which is seen as an act guided by God's good patronage (van der Woude 1976, 213; Kessler 1999, 165–66; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 523; Dempster 2017, 158).

The LXX renders *šīṭṭim* with *schoinoon,* "reeds." Condrea (2017) supposed that in the time of the Greek translator, the toponym Shittim had become obsolete and a reference to the "burning bush" near Mount Sinai was substituted (Exod 3:1–6), thus enlarging the period of divine shelter from before the exodus until after the conquest (see also Jacobs 2001, 251–52). Ryssel (1887, 94) suggested that Greek *schoinoon* was an error for *schinon,* a mastic tree found in Arabia. Since the other versions do not share this reading, there is no need to change the MT.

in order to know the righteous acts of YHWH. The narration on the past functions as religious instruction (Hillers 1984, 78). The author of Micah 6 uses this short but comprehensive historical catechism to show Israel that YHWH's attitude toward his people has always been benign and that there is no ground for any complaint. The plural noun *ṣidqôt,* "blameless behavior," qualifies the acts of God. Sometimes, his guidance might have been tiresome for Israel or perceived as against the people's interests, but eventually God's acts turned out to be favorable to the real interests of the people.

Comments

History is more than what it often seems to be: a set of dull facts from a time long ago. History is a narrative on the past. It is a construction of the past and is never without ideology. It communicates the narrator's view of the past and invites readers to share that view and take the lesson for their acts in the present. The author of Mic 6:3–5 is aiming farther. When accepting his view of the past, the Israelite readers or hearers are summoned to act accordingly and to recognize that YHWH has done them no harm; quite the contrary. Here, history writing functions not unlike a lesson or a sermon—as a mirror in which a person detects and discovers his or her own personal failures.

Even today, history writing is never neutral. It gives a representation of the past through the gaze of the historian. This is a delicate matter, especially when political power is involved and the past is abused for the aims of dictators and other ill-intentioned people. On the other hand, reflections on the past can help people find a way out of misery and disaster. The present crisis in Ukraine is a witness for both.

A Counter-Merchandising Proposal (6:6–8)

6 [6]"How shall I approach YHWH
and prostrate myself before God on high?
Shall I approach him with burnt offerings,
with one-year-old calves?
[7]Will YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand streams of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my womb for my personal sin?
[8]He has told you, human, what is good
and what YHWH requires of you:
it is to do justice, to love kindness,
and to behave prudently by walking with your God."

Introduction

Micah 6:6–8 is of great importance for ethics and morality. Many read verse 8 as a basic instruction for how to act as a Jew or a Christian. This morality of modesty, however, should first be read in its original textual and historical contexts. The section consists of two elements. First, verses 6–7 contain the answer to the divine plea in 6:4–5, albeit in the form of four questions. Second, in verse 8 a prophetic voice directs the reader in an unexpected moral direction.

Some scholars assume a very specific cultic background for verses 6–7 (Weiser 1949, 249–51; Renaud 1977, 404–13; Tångberg 1987, 60; Schart 1998, 194; Smith-Christopher 2015, 193–94). According to these scholars, the verses reflect a "ritual for the entrance to the temple" (see Pss 15, 24; Isa 33) that contained a series of questions about the morality of arriving pilgrims. In Micah 6, the temple does not play a role. In the ritual referred to, very specific questions are posed, while in Micah 6, only a general

attitude is discussed. Therefore, the suggestion is not convincing (see van der Woude 1976, 213–14). It would be better to construe 6:6–7 as reflex from the grief process. Many people, when they realize that their death is impending, start bargaining for a reprieve with doctors and often the divine (see Kübler-Ross 1973). I construe Mic 6:6–7 as the expression of a people in grief for their trespasses who are trying to ward off their demise, destruction, and decay with an abundance of offerings to God.

There are no indications that parts of Micah 6–7 have been added by a later redactor.

Notes

6:6. *How shall I approach YHWH*. The verb *qādam,* Pi., basically means "to be in front." In this context, the process of arriving at that position is meant (see Deut 23:5; Pss 21:4, 59:11; Neh 13:2). The context suggests a cultic act (De Moor 2020, 290). The "I" character personifies the people. The view that King Ahaz speaks on behalf of the inhabitants of Judah (De Moor 2020, 288–90) is intriguing but depends on the dating of the chapter. Besides, not only the king was seen as trespassing, and too specific an identification weakens the poetic power of the words.

and prostrate myself. The verb *kāpap,* Ni., "to bow oneself down," refers to a simple act of subjugation to a superior and hence a form of worship (Gruber 1980, 138–39). Here, the collective "I" is willing to abase themselves before God. The recognition of their trespasses makes them humble.

before God on high. The noun *mārôm,* "height," indicates heaven, the sky, or everything above the earth. Dahood (1967, 432) argued that the expression "God of the height" should be construed as "Exalted One" (see also Jer 31:12; Pss 10:5, 56:3). The construct-absolute junction should be read, however, as an adverbial genitive of location (see Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §9.5.2f).

Shall I approach him with burnt offerings. The *ʿōlāh,* "burnt offering, holocaust," is an offering to God of a completely burned animal without blemish. The aim of the offering is to appease God and to restore the broken relationship with him (van der Woude 1976, 212–13; Watts 2006).

one-year-old calves? According to later regulations, an *ʿēgèl,* "calf," could be given as a purification offering (Lev 9:2). The ritual described in Leviticus 9 is clearly postexilic, but the nonblood elements could have deep roots in the history of the Israelite religion. Sin offerings presume the guilt of the person offering them and the intention of that person to atone before God.

The two offerings suggested in verse 6 can be considered realistic sacrifices. They are appropriate for the trespasses they seek to address.

6:7. *Will YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams*. The sacrifice of an *ʾayil,* "ram," was part of the rites of the reparation offering, which had as its aim the repair of one's relationship to YHWH, which had been damaged by cheating him or a person or for destroying or robbing (Lev 5:14–6:7, 7:1–6; see Knohl 2004; Lam 2016, 149–54). Although the regulations were formalized in postexilic times, the custom certainly had preexilic roots. The number of rams to be offered here is large; elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible the offering of two, five, or twenty rams is mentioned. The only instance where a thousand rams are referred to is in the Chronicler's narrative concerning the transfer

of power from David to Solomon. Before acclaiming a new king, one thousand rams were offered (1 Chr 29:21). According to 2 Chr 30:24, Hezekiah provided the enormous numbers of one thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep for sacrifice. De Moor (2020, 291) refers to the Zukru festival that was celebrated every seventh year in ancient Emar, at which seven hundred lambs, fifty cows, and twelve calves were offered (Emar VI 373:213′–14′; *CoS* 1, 123; see Fleming 2000, 48–140; Yamada 2010; Thames 2020).

Pleasing the deity is the focal aim of the offering. The verb *rāṣāh* expresses the emotion of a deity who accepts the offering and after that is willing to restart the relationship broken by human guilt (van der Woude 1976, 215; Waltke 2007, 359; Jenson 2008, 171).

with ten thousand streams of oil? The libation of oil as an offering is not known in the Hebrew Bible (van der Woude 1976, 215). The substance *šèmèn,* "oil," is used in the process of anointing (for instance 1 Sam 16:1, Ps 89:21) and is part of the meat and burnt offerings as prescribed in the Priestly source (Leviticus and Numbers). Again, the abundance beyond human capacity is telling (Kessler 1999, 267–68; Ben Zvi 2000, 148; Gignilliat 2019, 199–200; Boloje 2019, 810–14). The "ten thousand streams" fit the impossible pattern of bargaining with the divine as part of the grief process.

Shall I give my firstborn. This suggestion raises the delicate possibility of sacrificing a child (Noort 2007). Because of the scarcity of the evidence and its often-tendentious character, there is no scholarly consensus on this issue. It is uncertain to what degree child sacrifice was performed. Its connection to a deity—YHWH, Malik, Molek, Shadday, or Baal—remains unclear. A few things, however, are certain. The custom of child sacrifice was not unknown but rather rare in the ancient Near East (Stager 1980; Heider 1985; Day 1989; Stavrakopoulou 2004). It should be noted that the custom was much more frequent in the Greek and Roman world (Hughes 1991). I discuss a few possible pieces of evidence from ancient Israel and the surrounding cultures that are pertinent to the discussion (see generally Bauks 2016).

The story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 depicts the God of Israel as a testing God who wants to know to what degree Abraham will be faithful and obedient. In that story, the sacrifice of a child does not actually take place, but the narrative assumes that its readers will recognize the custom. The fact that Genesis 22 could be read as a dismissal of this kind of sacrifice and hence as an ethical lesson underscores the reality of its possibility in ancient Israel (Heider 1985, 273–78; Day 1989, 85; Boehm 2004; Bauks 2007; Michel 2003, 246–316; Morschauser 2021).

Judges 11:28–40 narrates the story of Jephthah and his vow to sacrifice as a burnt offering "whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites" should God let him be victorious. His nameless daughter comes out first to welcome him, and so he is forced to "do to her as he had vowed" (Judg 11:39). Although this story should be read as a warning against rash vows (see Deut 23:22), it suggests, in a heart-breaking way, the existence of the practice of child sacrifice (Bauks 2007, 2010; Lockwood 2019).

In the stories on King Ahab, a short but intriguing passage narrates that in his days a certain Hiel from Bethel rebuilt the town of Jericho: "He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub" (1 Kgs 16:34). Stavrakopoulou (2004, 141) reads this line as a reference to the custom of sacrificing a child during the ritual of laying the first foundation. Since the text is rather

vague, it only says that the building was *bĕ-,* "at the cost of" (see *DCH* 2:85, sub 10), the sons of Hiel. It is far from certain that this passage should be seen as hard evidence for the custom.

The book of Kings further narrates that at the moment the joint forces of the Israelites, Judaeans, and Edomites had almost defeated the army of the Moabite king Mesha, "he took his eldest son who would have reigned in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering upon the wall; and there was great anger upon Israel" (2 Kgs 3:27). This sacrifice caused disgust among the Israelites and led to their retreat. It should be noted that this information is given by a Judaean or Israelite writer aiming to depict Mesha as a brutal and gruesome ruler. The remark could be no more than pure propaganda, but even that would suppose acquaintance with the practice of child sacrifice among the intended readership (Bauks 2010, 44–48; Chisholm 2011).

Difficult to understand are two rituals known from the Hebrew Bible. One is the act of "dedicating" (lit. "to cause to pass over," Hi. *ʿābar;* Lev 18:21, Jer 32:35) or "giving" (*nātan;* Lev 20:2–4) a child to the deity Molek. In view of the Punic evidence regarding the *mlk*-offering, interpreted as a sacrifice of children, the act has been seen as an illicit Israelite child sacrifice (Heider 1985, 223–400; Michel 2003, 275–78; Stavrakopoulou 2004, 207–60). In my view, this act does not necessarily have to be connected with a deadly sacrifice. Words from the sphere of death are absent in the respective texts from the Hebrew Bible. More probably, the expression hints at an initiation rite (see Weinfeld 1972; Xella 2012). The same should be said about the phrase "to cause the children to go through the fire" (for instance 2 Kgs 16:3, 17:17, 21:6, 23:10; Ezek 20:31). This custom does not contain the element of "burning"—the verb *śārap* is absent in most of the occurrences, and where it is used, it should be read metaphorically as an indication of "devoting to fire cleansing"—but most probably refers to an act of passing through a ring of fire that was supposed to have a cleansing effect before entering the community (see Weinfeld 1972; Albertz 1992, 301; Bauks 2010, 40–44). The view of Weinfeld and others has been challenged. Morton Smith (1975), for instance, disagrees with Weinfeld's metaphorical interpretation of what Smith construes as euphemistic language regarding real acts of burning children (see also Flynn 2018, 160–74). The graphic depictions of child sacrifice from Pozo Moro in Spain have been brought to bear as an argument in favor of ancient Israelite child sacrifice (Rundin 2004), but I find it difficult to relate this expression of the belief of pre–Indo-European Iberians with the religion of ancient Israel.

Hackett (1984, 78–85) has proposed to read a section in Combination II of the Deir ʿAllā inscription as a reference to the sacrifice of a child to the *shaddayin* deities (*KAI* 312 2:4–8; Hoftijzer and van der Kooij 1976; *CoS* 2.27; adopted by only Stavrakopoulou 2004, 261–72). It should be noted that the pertinent lines in the Deir ʿAllā inscription are enigmatic. Since the text does not mention verbs for killing or offering, the proposal should be abandoned (see Dewrell 2017).

In Palestine/Israel, thus far, no archaeological traces of the sacrifice of children or other humans have been found. Iconography might shed a different light, however. Reliefs on Egyptian temple walls from the New Kingdom have been interpreted as evidence for Canaanite child sacrifice in the second millennium BCE (Spalinger 1978). In the representation of the successful campaigns against Palestine of the pharaohs of the Nineteenth Dynasty depicted on stela in Karnak, Luxor, Medinet-Habu, and Bēt

el-Wāli (Nubia), human or child offerings by Canaanite rulers in an attempt to appease the Egyptians are presented. The relief on the siege of Ashkelon from Karnak, for instance, shows desperate Canaanites throwing their offspring from the city walls into the hands of the Egyptians (Wreszinski 1935, plate 58; there might be a connection with a remark in Lucian, *De syria dea*, §58, on the throwing of children from the roofs of a temple in Hierapolis). The scene on the Karnak relief could also be construed, however, as an act of providing children for captivity as a sign of surrender (see Bauks 2010, 34–38).

The situation in Carthage is difficult to assess. The Greek author Plutarch rebukes the Carthaginians for their primitive custom of sacrificing children to appease their gods (Plutarch, *Moralia: De superstitione* 13.1 = 172 C–D). This view could have been based on prejudice. Punic inscriptions, however, clearly attest to the act of sacrificing children (e.g., *KAI* 79; Heider 1985, 185–94), although some texts refer to a substitute sacrifice of a newborn child (e.g., *KAI* 98–99). The custom of child sacrifice in Carthage is evidenced by excavations in the local tophet. At this graveyard, remains of animals and of children, with traces of slaughter, were found that correlate with the custom (Heider 1985, 196–203; Stavrakopoulou 2004, 207–60; Bonnet 2010, 162; Schwartz et al. 2017; Lewis 2020, 255). It is remiss of modern moral perception to judge such acts.

In Mesopotamian and Egyptian texts, the topos of a child sacrifice is absent. In Mesopotamia, the burial of dead children as foundation sacrifices seems to have been a widespread ritual, according to archaeological findings. There is a problem, however, of interpretation of the evidence. The skeletons found do not answer the question of whether the children died natural deaths or were sacrificed for the occasion (Meyer 2001, 225–27). In Egypt, no remains of human sacrifices as founding gifts in buildings have been found. The skeletons found in building foundations in Tanis and in Mendes/Tel er-Rub'a should be construed as regular burials (Letellier 1977, 910; Redford 2019).

According to textual evidence, the sacrifice of a single individual usually functions as a substitute for the whole community to accomplish ritually its salvation. It can serve to compensate for the guilt of a person or a group. It can also serve to change a negative state into a positive state or to bring about salvation in an emergency (Judg 11, 2 Kgs 3).

In sum: There is no hard evidence for the existence of child sacrifice in ancient Israel. Some glimpses of this sacrifice, however, can be seen in the Hebrew Bible. The custom was likely part of religion at a local level and was a primary reflex in situations of great distress. The authors of the Hebrew Bible, however, generally dismiss the sacrifice of children and other humans (Gen 22, Judg 11; Heider 1985, 318; Day 1989, 66–67; Michel 2003; Dewrell 2017; Markl 2019). Whether Heider (1985, 401–8) is correct in assuming that this dismissal replaced an earlier acceptance is difficult to assess, and what one concludes depends on the interpretation and dating of the evidence. In the suggestions to appease God in Micah 6, the custom is presented as an uncontrolled reflex by someone in deep need and confusion. The context in Micah 6 makes clear, however, that child sacrifice is a possible way to appease God (Heider 1985, 316–19).

the fruit of my womb for my personal sin? The expression *pĕrî biṭnî,* "the fruit of my womb," refers poetically to human offspring. Like the *bĕkôr,* "firstling (of the flock)," the "first fruits of the harvest" were supposed to be sanctified to YHWH, or even given as an offering to thank as well as appease the deity. That such an unwanted offering is considered here as a possibility is another indication of the fact that this verse is

drenched in the language of negotiation with an angry God. Although the noun *bèṭèn,* "womb," is often connected to the female body (e.g., Gruber 2007, 1–2), the word can also be used of the male belly (e.g., Judg 3:21, Ps 132:11). It might even be a euphemism for the *membrum virile*.

The Hebrew noun *nèpèš* is not easily translated. Traditionally, it has been construed in a Neoplatonic way as the immortal part of a human being temporarily compounded to or caged in the body. With the rise of Enlightenment thinking and the growth of the insights of biology, this view was abandoned. Many scholars render *nèpèš* with "breath" and see the *nèpèš* as an inseparable part of the body enabling life that will end with "the last breath" (e.g., Wolff 1974). This view, however, is a modern hermeneutical adaptation to a materialistic frame in anthropology. The excavation and publication of the Sam'alian-Aramaic Kuttamuwa inscription from eighth-century BCE Zincirli has shed new light on the meaning of the word *nèpèš* (Pardee 2009; Steiner 2015, 128–62; *CoS* 4.23). This memorial stela contains the sentence "a sheep every year and let him slaughter it *bnbšy*" (lines 9–11). This implies that a yearly sacrifice should be done. The phrasing is intriguing, since Aramaic *nbš* is a cognate of Hebrew *npš*. The wording assumes the idea that within the stone a disembodied entity was present representing Kuttamuwa (Steiner 2015). This idea should be connected to the Iron Age tradition attested in Syria and northern Arabia of erecting a *nps* stele for commemorative purposes (Hayajneh 2017, with examples). As for Biblical Hebrew, this idea implies that the *nèpèš* should be seen as a personality element of the human body that after being disembodied could be present, for instance, in a grave or on a commemorative stele. When applied to a living soul, the word denotes something like our present-day "personality."

6:8. *He has told you, human, what is good*. On the basis of the passive rendering in the LXX, *'anèggelè,* "has it been proclaimed," Willi-Plein (1971, 98) proposes to read **hûggad,* "it has been proclaimed" in the MT (also McKane 1998, 186). The passive rendering of the LXX, however, is interpretive. The translators reformulated the text as an interrogative clause, based on the view that *māh* is to be seen as an interrogative pronoun (see Jacobs 2001, 254; Glenny 2015, 162–63).

I do not construe *māh-ṭôb,* "what is good," and *māh-YHWH dôrēš mimmekā,* "what YHWH requires of you," as interrogatives, as has often been done (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 503; Waltke 2007, 363; Dempster 2017, 159). The two clauses are subordinated as accusative clauses to the main clause at the beginning of 6:8, "He has told you," and phrase the contents of what has been told. They should be construed as relative indicators (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §18.2–3).

The Hebrew use of *'ādām* is not to be understood as a proper name, "Adam," but as a collective noun meaning "humankind, every Israelite." It cannot be restricted to a reference to the king—seen as responsible for justice and solidarity (Lescow 1966, 57; Shaw 1993, 178; Waltke 2007, 362–64; De Moor 2020, 293–94). The moral summons of Mic 6:8 is addressed to the whole of humanity, especially those living in and around Jerusalem.

and what YHWH requires of you. In the Hebrew Bible the verb *dāraš,* "to seek, inquire," generally has a human being as its subject: humankind is seeking the truth or inquiring in the hope of receiving an oracle. In some cases, God is the subject of the verb. In a couple of texts, the verb describes the divine demand (e.g., Deut 18:19, Ezek 20:40). The object of God's requirement is a form of moral conduct by the Israelites. In Mic 6:8, the verb refers to the basic moral and social attitude that is placed opposite the

abundant sacrifices and, by implication, as a fitting alternative to them. This conduct is not presented as a way to appease the divine but as standard behavior within the divine-human relationship.

it is to do justice, to love kindness. The conjunction *kî* has often been read as pointing at an antithesis: "but" or "other than." In 6:8, *kî* should be construed as an emphatic particle having explicative force: the clauses in 6:8b offer, perhaps, an explanation of what is good (Schoors 1981; Aejmelaeus 1986; Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §39.3.4e; Waltke 2007, 364).

Comparable to 3:1 and 3:9, the noun *mišpāṭ,* "justice," refers to the divine social code that is accepted by a community and that functions as an instrument for the continuation of that community through time (Niehr 1986). By acting according to this code, Israel will continue to be YHWH's partner in time (Cruz 2016, 139–41; Dempster 2017, 160–61). This summons reminds one of a line in the Instructions to Merikare, a text in which morality is also superior to offerings: "Do justice, then You endure on Earth!" (Lichtheim 2006, 1.106, line 55 = *CoS* 1.35; Ben Zvi 2000, 148–49). Love is the deeply felt emotional bond between two or more people (Olyan 2017). The verb *'āhab,* "to love," in the Hebrew Bible often has a personal object (to love someone). In some instances, however, the object of love is neither human nor divine. "Things"—almost always abstract concepts—can be loved, such as "good" (Amos 5:15), "evil" (Ps 52:5, Mic 3:2), "peace" (Zech 8:19), and "truth" (Zech 8:19). The combination with *ḥèsèd,* "kindness, solidarity, loyalty," is unique for Mic 6:8 (Sakenfeld 1985; Tångberg 1987, 61; Kessler 1999, 270–71; Cruz 2016, 142–44; Kabongo 2021).

to behave prudently by walking with your God. The word *haṣnēa'* is an infinitive absolute that should be rendered as referring to an independent act not adverbially colored. Since the verb form *haṣnēa'* is followed by an infinitive, perhaps it is best translated as "and to behave prudently by walking. . . ."

The root *ṣn'* is traditionally construed as expressing a form of humility (Sellin 1922, 294; McKane 1998, 187–90; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 529–30; Jacobs 2001, 245; Jenson 2008, 173–74; O'Brien 2015, 88; Boloje 2019, 815–16; Kabongo 2021). Robinson and Horst (1964, 146) translate as "*in Reinheit*." Van der Woude (1976, 219) has correctly noted that the word should be construed as a wisdom term (elaborating on an idea of Hyatt [1952]). The root is also attested in texts like Prov 11:2; Sir 16:25, 35:3, and 42:8. Hence, a translation with "to act prudently, deliberately" should be preferred over the traditional rendition "to act humbly"; note that the Vulgate already renders with *et sollicitum ambulare cum Deo tuo*, "to walk punctiliously." The LXX is without an adverbial adjunct (van der Woude 1976, 219; adopted by Wolff 1982, 17, "*aufmerksam*"; Tångberg 1987, 61; Kessler 1999, 257, "*besonnen*"; Runions 2001, 168; De Moor 2005, 98; Smith-Christopher 2015, 193, "mindfully"). (See also Hillers 1984, 75–79; Shaw 1993, 162; Ben Zvi 2000, 149; De Moor 2020, 295; *pace,* e.g., *DCH* 7:136–37.) In sum, Israel is advised to walk wisely and to reflect before acting. In view of the parallels within the verse, these deliberations need to anchored in "justice" and "kindness."

Comments

When confronted with evil or doom, humans naturally react by negotiating with the power or powers understood to be the cause of trouble. This negotiation often takes the

form of an overabundant gift to appease that force. Would God respond to that negotiation? Would God accept a superhuman gift or an untenable promise as a condition for reconciliation with Israel? Micah 6:8 offers an important mental and moral switch. What God asks of people is sober simplicity. In response to the people's proposal, the author reports that they know well what God wants from them. They should know how to live with each other, with themselves, and with God (Robinson and Horst 1964, 146–47). The saying in 6:8 is not a ready-made answer or a clear ethical principle but a reference to a basic attitude (Weiser 1949, 252–53; Mays 1976, 141–42; Smith-Christopher 2015, 192–98; Cruz 2016, 139; Coomber 2021, 221–22).

When it comes to morality or ethics, many people tend to think of rules and regulations about what is and what is not allowed. Micah refers to a way to live. He offers the supporting beams of morality. What matters is loving solidarity and a sense of community. The readers of this text are invited to live thoughtfully and in an ongoing conversation with their consciences. Christian moral conduct should result in a life of responsibility for God's creation and the reality forged by the incarnation as described in *Ethics* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Or, to phrase the same point differently, the face of the other, and especially the *pĕnê YHWH,* should encourage a life of respecting the other and taking responsibility for the community (Levinas 1979). In the present day, Lum (2021, 26–29) considers Micah 6:8 to be a moral compass for all those who have to steer through the tides of the COVID-19 crisis.

Economics Accused (6:9–12)

6 [9]The voice of YHWH calls to the city.
—It is prudence to fear your name—.
Hear, O tribe
and who directs her.
[10]Are there still treasures of transgression in the house of the transgressor
and a scanty and cursed ephah?
[11]Will I remain pure before wicked balances
and before a bag with deceptive weights?
[12]For her rich people are full of violence
and her inhabitants speak falsehood.
Their tongue is deceitful in their mouths.

Introduction

The court case between God and Israel continues. Micah 6:9–12 consists of three parts. After a summons to continue listening to the divine voice, there follows a set of questions on economic transgressions culminating in a smirking conclusion regarding the behavior of the rich elite. Read this way, the verses can be seen as a coherent section. Some scholars, however, believe that the unit is in disorder (Sellin 1922, 296–99; Tournay 1964, 514; Weiser 1949, 253–56). According to them, literary-critical interventions are necessary. The second clause in 6:9 as well as the words "in the house of the transgressor" in 6:10 are generally seen as glosses (van der Woude 1976, 221; Renaud 1977, 442–43; Shaw 1993, 162; Kessler 1999, 274; Jeremias 2007, 205), as is the final line of verse 12, probably borrowed from Ps 120:2–3 (Hillers 1984, 80). Werse (2019, 230–35) suggests that 6:9aαb, 10–16 were part of the Four Redaction I, connecting Micah with Amos, Hosea, and Zephaniah. Some scholars suggest that verse 12 be placed after verse 9, which would result in syntactically better Hebrew (Mays 1976, 143; Hillers 1984, 80–81). This proposal, however, is not supported by the textual witnesses.

Notes

6:9. *The voice of YHWH calls to the city*. The expression *qôl YHWH* is to be construed as a construct chain (van der Woude 1976, 223). The line should be read in parallelism with 6:1 where Israel is also summoned to listen. The *qôl YHWH* does not refer as such to divine commandments (*pace* van der Woude 1976, 223–24) and to the divine voice raised in the strife. God continues to defend his position. After having made clear in the historical summary that he is not to blame for the turmoil that has arisen, he now summarizes the transgressions of the local elite.

The verb *qārā',* "to call, cry, summon," has a broad range of meaning. In the present context, it has the connotation "to call to account." With the moral code of 6:8 in mind, the inhabitants of the city are invited to answer to God. Have they really walked deliberately?

In 6:9, the *'îr,* "city," in not mentioned by name. A great majority of scholars construe this city to be Jerusalem (see Wellhausen 1963, 147–48; Kessler 1999, 277; De Moor 2020, 296). On the basis of his theory that Micah 6–7 was composed by an eighth-century BCE prophet from the Northern Kingdom, van der Woude (1976, 222) has proposed that "the city" refers to Samaria. He observes that nowhere in Micah 6–7 is the Southern Kingdom mentioned and refers to the fact that in 6:16, the "statutes of Omri and all the works of the house of Ahab" are mentioned as the root cause of divine punishment. Although his proposal makes sense, there is one problem. In the Josianic age, in which I believe Micah 6–7 was composed, the Northern Kingdom had ceased to be an independent entity. In my view, however, the identification of "the city" with Samaria and the mention of the evil deeds of Omri and Ahab function as a warning to the implied Judaean audience reminding them of the fate of their northern relatives.

It is prudence to fear your name. This short clause contains a few problems. The Masoretic vocalization *yir'èh,* "he sees," is difficult to maintain. It leads to an awkward clause containing an incongruity between subject and verb: "sound wisdom sees your name." Since the LXX (*foboumḗnous*) and Vulgate (*timentibus*) as well as the targum and the Syriac translation have forms of the verb "to fear," it is wise to assume that a form of the verb *yārā',* "to fear," is more original (e.g., van der Woude 1976, 224; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 539; Runions 2001, 169; De Moor 2020, 296).

The noun *tûšiyyāh,* "sound wisdom, prudence, competence," is clearly rooted in wisdom thinking (Dempster 2017, 168). The noun is attested in the books of Job (11:6, 12:6, 26:3), Proverbs (2:7, 3:21, 8:14, 18:1), and Sirach (38:8) but also in Isa 28:9. It "denotes clear, proficient thinking in the exercise of power and practical operations" (Fox 1993, 162). To fear God is also an element from the wisdom frame: "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps 111:10). In this connection, it should be noted that *šĕmèkā,* "your name," is a synonym for YHWH. The connections with the language of wisdom as well as the sudden switch in perspective—from a description of God's acts to a confession directed to him—are used as an argument to consider this clause to be a later gloss (e.g., van der Woude 1976, 224). The argument seems strong but is not completely convincing. *Tûšiyyāh* can be seen as referring back to the verb form *haṣnēa',* "to act deliberately" (6:8). This "bridge" would then function as an indication that the conduct alluded to in 6:10–11 was not based on proficient thinking or deliberation.

Hear, O tribe. The MT reading *maṭṭèh,* "staff, rod," is problematic for several reasons. First, there is incongruity between this masculine noun and the feminine verb form *ye'ādāh*. Second, both the LXX (*phulè*) and Vulgate (*tribus*) seem to have a different *Vorlage*. Third, as a parallel to "city," "rod" does not make much sense. Nevertheless, a few scholars opt for this translation (for instance Sellin 1922, 296; Ben Zvi 2000, 155). Since the noun *maṭṭèh* also has the meaning "tribe" and this rendering would solve the problems in the text, this meaning is to be preferred (already Wellhausen 1963, 25; see also Hillers 1984, 80; Renaud 1977, 429; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 539; De Moor 2020, 297; *pace* van der Woude 1976, 225, "oppressor"). It is unclear to which of the Israelite tribes the noun *maṭṭèh* refers here. The use of this word, however, evokes the image of a community in which the moral code of ancient Israel still leads to solidarity.

and who directs her. The text of the MT—"and who appointed her"—is rather unintelligible in the context. "Tribes" are generally not appointed. They are shaped by history and heritage. The LXX *tis kosmèsei polin,* "who will adorn the city," is generally seen as a translation that construed the verb form *ye'ādāh* as derived from a verb *'ādāh* II, "to adorn," and not from *yā'ad,* "to appoint" (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 539; Glenny 2015, 174–75; Werse 2019, 231), or from a Hebrew verb cognate to Arabic *wa'ada,* "to promise," and talmudic Aramaic *y'd,* "to forewarn" (De Moor 2020, 297). The Vulgate *quis aprobabit illud,* "who approves of that," seems to be a free rendering of the MT. *BHS* draws the first word of 6:10, *'ôd,* to verse 9: "and who appointed her still?" (following the LXX; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 539; Smith-Christopher 2015, 198). That does not solve the problem, however. Some ingenious but rather unconvincing proposals have been made based on the last two words of verse 9 in combination with the first word of verse 10. Wellhausen (1963, 25), for instance, proposed to read **maṭṭèh ûmô'ēd hā'îr,* "the tribe and the gathering of the city" (adopted by Willi-Plein 1971, 100–101; R. L. Smith 1984, 53; Jacobs 2001, 255; Jeremias 2007, 205; O'Brien 2015, 94). Van der Woude (1976, 225) reads on the basis of the LXX **mî ya'adèh 'ôd,* "who robs constantly?," which connects clearly with the contents of verses 10–11. Problematic with his view, however, is the fact that neither Hebrew *'ādāh* nor Greek *kosmeoo* signifies "to rob." The Greek verb could mean "to put in order" (Mark 12:44, Luke 11:25) or "to order, arrange" (*LSJ* 934). Is it possible that the Hebrew *yā'ad* could have a comparable meaning?—hence a translation with "to direct, summon" would be possible (see Jeppesen 1984b: "to make a decision"; De Moor 2005, 98). In that case the clause would refer to the person in charge of the tribe.

6:10. *Are there still treasures of transgression in the house of the transgressor*. The compound *ha'iš* consists of two elements. The interrogative particle *ha-* is connected with the particle of existence *'iš,* "there is." The LXX (*pur*) and Vulgate (*ignis*) construed *'iš* as *'ēš,* "fire" (see also the Syriac version), which does not make much sense (*pace* Glenny 2015, 175). The emendations **ha'èššèh,* "shall I forget" (van der Woude 1976, 225–26; Mays 1976, 143; Kessler 1999, 274; Waltke 2007, 397; Jeremias 2007, 205), and **ha'èssè',* "shall I forgive" (Weiser 1949, 282; Wellhausen 1963, 145; McKane 1998, 194–95), are both unnecessary (see also De Moor 2020, 297). They have no basis in the ancient versions and disrupt the structure of the argument in verses 10–11, although they would stand parallel with the verb form *ha'èzkèh,* "will I be pure," in verse 11a (Jacobs 2001, 255–56).

The LXX *polin,* "city," probably read *'yr* instead of *'ôd,* likely influenced by the word "city" in verse 9. Since the other ancient versions do not have this reading, the MT should be maintained. The adverb *'ôd,* "still," underscores the interpretation that despite knowledge of the moral basics as formulated in 6:8, there are still transgressions.

Van der Woude (1976, 226) argues that the presence of words for weights and measures in the following clause indicates that in this line too, a word indicating some sort of measure would be expected. He construes the *'āleph* of the noun *'ōṣerôt* to be the final letter of the word **ha'èššèh,* "shall I forget," and reads *ṣerôt* as a variant spelling of *zr(w)t,* "span, handbreadth." This noun, however, always indicates distances (such as of the breastplate of Aaron in Exod 28:16) and never quantities of goods. Instead of accepting a chain of textual changes, I propose to read here an adverbial genitive: "the treasures (accumulated by) transgression" (Waltke and O'Connor, 1990, §9.5.2). The manipulated weights and measures should be seen as the instruments by which the wealth was wrongfully acquired.

The expected preposition *be* before *bêt,* "house," is elided often in Biblical Hebrew (Waltke and O'Connor, 1990, §11.2.5). The word *rāšā'* could be construed as a substantive—the house of the transgressor—or as an adjective—the transgressing house. Whose abode is meant is unclear. Most probably the economic elite are hinted at, although these words could also be read as a verdict on the temple profiting from unjust transactions. Although often proposed, I do not see these words as a gloss (contra, e.g., van der Woude 1976, 227).

and a scanty and cursed ephah? An *'êpāh,* "ephah," is a measure for grain of about 40 liters, comparable to the English bushel. The noun is an Egyptian loanword, although the size of an *ỉp.t* was smaller, about 8 liters (Noonan 2019). The social, agrarian code of ancient Israel forbids manipulating this measure (Deut 25:14–16; see also Amos 8:5). A corrupted ephah would lead to iniquity between the rich and the poor.

The adjective *rāzōn,* "scanty," refers to a measure narrowed for economic gain. By the end of the eighth century BCE, the standardization of weights and measures was accepted throughout the ancient Near East (De Moor 2020, 298–300). A manipulated ephah was seen as a "cursed ephah." It would fire up the anger of God and the community (Smith-Christopher 2015, 200–201).

6:11. *Will I remain pure*. The verb form *ha'èzkèh* has both an interrogative and a durative aspect. The "I" character—YHWH—asks himself whether or not he can continue being "pure" before the conduct of the economic elite. The verb *zākāh* denotes a position of moral purity or blamelessness and refers back to YHWH's defense in 6:3–5 where the picture is painted of a God who is not to blame.

before wicked balances. The noun *mō'znayîm* refers to a set of two scales that were used as balances to weigh goods or silver. The writers of the Hebrew Bible are aware of the human inclination to manipulate these balances in order to increase income. Such manipulated balances are labeled elsewhere as "deceptive" (Hos 12:8; Prov 11:1, 20:23) and construed as destructive for balance in the community. Micah 6:11 criticizes this habit as "wicked, unjust." It stands contrary to the social code of solidarity within the community.

and before a bag with deceptive weights? Traveling merchants most probably carried with them a bag of weights, mostly of stone (Wiedemann and Bayer 1990; Kletter

1998). Archaeology has revealed a few dozen "beqa-weights" (Kletter 1998). Again, there was the temptation to manipulate these weights for economic profit. The author of Micah 6–7 classifies these stones as *mirmāh,* "deceit."

It should be noted that the use of deceitful weights, and the moral condemnation of them, was not restricted to ancient Israel. The Mesopotamian Code of Hammurabi states: "If a merchant gives grain and silver for loan and when he gave for loan, he gave according to the small measure-stone and the grain according to that same small measure, but at the receipt he accepts the silver according to the great measure stone and the grain to the great measure stone, the merchant has to lose everything he received" (CH §94 = *CoS* 2, 131; the same idea is present in the Egyptian Book of the Dead and in the Instructions of Amenemope; *CoS* 1, 47). If a diety ignored these practices, it would be difficult for that deity to keep his position as a trustworthy and just god. The conduct of some members of the people of Israel challenges God to give up his long-suffering tolerance.

6:12. *For her rich people are full of violence*. The word *'ašèr* is used here as a conjunction introducing a causal clause (*DCH* 1:432–33; see van der Woude 1976, 228–29). The next clauses therefore formulate the reason(s) why the deeds of the elite are assessed as transgressions.

The 3.f.s. suffix refers to the unnamed city and tribe. The noun *'āšîr,* "rich," is as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible an indication of a member of the economic elite. The noun *ḥāmās,* "violence," qualifies the wealth of this elite as based on brutal aggressiveness instead of economic fair play. This concurs with the ideas in Micah 2–5 on how the elite abused the economic changes for their own greedy gain in a way that was detrimental to the interests of the depleted poor.

and her inhabitants speak falsehood. The noun *šèqèr,* "lie, falsehood, deception," indicates that the economic transgressions are veiled in euphemistic language, which is so often the case when the richer part of a population seeks to defend their abundant wealth. To this day, "fraud" is a signal of a world order that protects the interests of only some (Cruz 2016, 153).

Their tongue is deceitful in their mouths. This clause is often construed as an explanatory gloss (Willi-Plein 1971, 102; van der Woude 1976, 230). This view is difficult to evaluate. The line clearly repeats the idea of the previous clause, offering no new information that could support the view of the writer. There are, however, no clear breaches at the level of syntax or language.

Comments

Despite the moral code mentioned in 6:8, the rich elite of the people continue their unjust behavior using misleading measures. Their greed is destroying the fabric of society (Cruz 2016, 151; Boer 2015, 175–76). The author has YHWH say that in confrontation with such conduct, it will not be easy for him to remain a pure and loving deity. The point at stake can be reformulated in more theological language. YHWH is known to be *'èrèk 'appayîm,* "long suffering" (see Exod 34:6–7; Num 14:18; Jer 15:15; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:2; Pss 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Neh 9:17; Brueggemann 1997, 215–18). What are the boundaries of his patience, however? To what degree can humans offend God before he turns his kindness into revenge?

In our contemporary age, where institutions are devoted to gauge, calibrate, and keep watch over weights and measures, the problem of enrichment through manipulated instruments seems to be solved. However, unfair economic competition leading to extreme wealth is not fully banned. When international firms pay the market price for their materials and supplies, they often forget to pay for the harm done to nature. Airlines that do not have to pay consumer taxes for their fuel are privileged over the much more environmentally friendly railway companies.

Futility as Doom (6:13–16)

6

[13]I, myself, will make you sick
by smiting you, ravaging, for your sins.
[14]You will eat,
but you will not be satisfied,
and your vileness will be in your midst.
You will plant a hedge,
but you will not preserve anything,
and what you do preserve
I will give to the sword.
[15]You will sow,
but you will not reap.
You will tread the olive,
but will not anoint yourself with oil;
and press,
but you will not drink wine.
[16]For the statutes of Omri have been kept
and all the work of the house of Ahab.
They have walked according to their disobedient acts.
Therefore, I will make you an object of horror
and her inhabitants an object of abhorrence.
You will bear the reproach of my people.

Introduction

Micah 6:13–16 contains a prophecy of doom. In connection with the previous section, it describes the situation that will arise if God loses his temper after the people offend him. The literary form of the prophecy is that of a series of futility clauses (see Hillers 1964, 28–29; Mays 1976, 147–48; Hillers 1984, 80–82; O'Brien 2015, 95–97). A

futility clause is a form of speech that indicates that human actions will not yield the expected result (Quick 2018). For instance, eating normally leads to a feeling of satisfaction. A futility clause indicates that a divine punishment will break such an expected chain of cause and consequence. These curses depict a chaotic future (P. A. Krüger 2012). The language of the futility clause has deep roots in the ancient Near East. In a *kudurru* (boundary stone) of the twelfth-century BCE Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar I, one reads that a trespasser will be severely punished:

> In the anger of their heart may the great gods plan evil against him, so that another may own the house he built. With a dagger in his neck and a poniard in his eyes, may he cast down his face before his captor and may the latter, unmindful of his pleading, quickly cut off his life. In the collapse of his house may his hands get into the mire, as long as he lives may he drag along misery, and as long as heaven and earth exist may his seed perish. (V. R. 56 = *BBS*, VI ii 51–60; see also Steymans 1995, 123)

The clause "another may own the house he built" is a clear example of the second part of a futility clause. The theme is adapted in a curse in the Loyalty Oaths of Esarhaddon: "May your sons not take possession of your house / But a strange enemy will divide your goods" (VTE = SAA 2.6 429–30 = *CoS* 4.36; see also Steymans 1995, 101–5).

Many examples could be added from the ancient Near East. The pattern is present not only in Mesopotamian texts, but also in the bilingual inscription from Tell Fekherye (Abou-Assaf, Bordreuil, and Millard 1982; Assyrian, 30–38; Aramaic, 18–22; *CoS* 2.34) and in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., in Deut 28 and in prophetic texts; Hillers 1964).

In Micah 6, these curses are enveloped by (1) an announcement of doom (6:13) and (2) a motivation that locates the transgression mentioned in a broader light: the continuation of the path developed by the Northern Kingdom will lead to the dismantling of the Southern Kingdom.

Not much has been said about the role of these verses in the composition history of Micah. Werse (2019, 230–35) suggests that 6:9aαb, 10–16 were part of the Four Redaction I, connecting Micah with Amos, Hosea, and Zephaniah.

Notes

6:13. *I, myself, will make you sick*. The particle *gam* connected with a personal pronoun has an emphatic force (see *gam hû',* "he himself," Gen 32:19; Labuschagne 1966a; Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §39.3.4d). In utilizing this particle, the author stresses the view that God will execute the punishment himself (van der Woude 1976, 230).

The verb form *hèḥelêtî* is to be construed as a Hi. perfect 1.c.s. of the verb I *ḥālāh,* "to be sick." The LXX *archoomai,* "I will rule," and Vulgate *coepi,* "I will begin, initiate," indicate that the ancient translators must have either had a different *Vorlage* or vocalized the consonantal text differently. Van der Woude (1976, 230) suggested that the word be read **haḥillôtî,* "I will begin" (Hi. perfect 1.c.s. of the verb II *ḥālal,* "to start, begin") (following Sellin 1922, 297; Wellhausen 1963, 148; see also Mays 1976, 143; Renaud 1977, 430; McKane 1998, 196). This would explain the Vulgate but not the LXX. I could not find a Hebrew form that would explain both ancient versions (*pace* Glenny 2015, 180, who suggested the verb *ḥîl,* "to wait for"). In view of the parallelism with "I myself,"

a form of the verb *ḥālāh* V, "to be alone," would be appropriate, although the Hi. of this verb does not occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Clines (*DCH* 3:229) proposes "make wound unique," emending the next word to *makkāh,* "wound." For now, the MT should be retained until a convincing solution has been found (thus Allen 1976, 376; Shaw 1993, 163; R. L. Smith 1984, 53; Kessler 1999, 274; De Moor 2020, 302–3).

by smiting you, ravaging, for your sins. The *verbum finitum* form "I will make you sick" is followed by two asyndetically connected infinitives—*hakkôtèkā* and *hašmēm*. These infinitives indicate the way in which God will make the people sick (see Waltke and O'Connor, 1990, §35.3.2, on the adverbial function of the infinitive). The verb *nākāh,* Hi., "to strike, smite," occurs almost five hundred times in the Hebrew Bible. In prophetic texts and with God as subject, the verb indicates a form of striking in punishment, or for correction (e.g., Isa 5:25; Jer 2:39, 5:3, 14:9, 30:14; Ezek 32:15; Hos 6:1; Amos 3:15, 6:11; see *DCH* 5:685; De Moor 2020, 303).

The less frequent Hi. of the verb *šāmam,* "to make desolate, to devastate," hints at the result of the impending blow: a desolate land in disorder. Van der Woude (1976, 231) makes a connection with the covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, in which both verbs occur, but not as a word pair. I agree that "smiting" and "desolating" occur in these texts as forms of divine punishment for breaking the "binding agreement." Not every text in which these verbs occur, however, should be construed as covenant-related, as there were different frames to describe the relationship between God and people.

The reason for the acts of God are the sins of the people. This small clause makes clear that the impending blow is God's answer to human conduct that jeopardized the relationship between God and people (Knierim 1967; Boda 2009; Lam 2016). The people had missed their mark.

6:14. In five futility curses, the effects of the impending desolation are envisioned. All five underscore that a time is coming in which the normal order and the expected outcome of human actions will be disrupted. The first two have an addition to the curse that emphasizes their gravity. Some scholars construe these additions, often together with verse 14b, as part of a later redaction (van der Woude 1976, 232). Verse 14b admittedly differs in that it does not refer to the processes of agricultural production, as do the other curses. In my view, the safekeeping of food for later consumption is not a very distant semantic field. As for the explanatory clauses, they should be read as underscoring the seriousness of the coming threat.

You will eat, but you will not be satisfied. This curse can be seen as an inversion of the traditional indication of prosperity due to divine guidance: "you have eaten and are satisfied" (Deut 8:10; see also Ps 91:14–16; with Cruz 2016, 156). The topic occurs a few times in futility curses in the Hebrew Bible: Lev 26:26, Isa 9:19, Hos 4:10, Hag 1:6.

The curse has parallels in old Hittite mythological texts (Quick 2018, 95–99). Here is an example from a text labeled "the disappearance of the storm-god": "[They ate], but could not get enough / They drank, but could not quench their thirst" (*CTH* 325 A 1:16–22; see Hoffner and Beckman 1998, 21; Quick 2018, 98).

and your vileness will be in your midst. The noun *yèšaḥ* is a *hapax legomenon* with an uncertain meaning (Willi-Plein 1971, 102). The renderings in the ancient versions—LXX: "darkness" (probably based on the assonant noun *ḥošèk,* "darkness"; Glenny 2015, 182); Vulgate: "humiliation"; targum: "sickness"; Peshitta: "dysentery"—are more or

less informed guesses. Since the word must refer to something to be found in a human belly that normally would not remain there, various suggestions have been made in recent scholarship: "dysentery" (Ehrman 1973; Waltke 2007, 402), "garbage" (R. L. Smith 1984, 53), "hunger, emptiness" (Rudolph 1975, 116–17; Williamson 1997, 367–68; Runions 2001, 171; Jeremias 2007, 206; O'Brien 2015, 96), "hollowness" (De Moor 2000, 174; 2005, 99), "constipation" (McKane 1998, 196–98; De Moor 2020, 308), "excrement" (Ben Zvi 2000, 155), "semen virile" (Sellin 1922, 297; van der Woude 1976, 233; Mays 1976, 143), and "vulva" (Cathcart in Cathcart and Jeppesen 1987, 114). In view of the announcement "I will make you sick," a rendering with a word for an illness as the result of undernourishment is to be preferred. Other scholars opt for an emendation of the text that only leads to further curious conjectures. The meaning of the clause, however, is clear: as a result of the forthcoming blow, the human body will not be satisfied by food but filled with emptiness or illness (see also Cruz 2016, 156–57). I therefore dismiss the interpretation that this line refers to a military attack (Mays 1976, 143; Jeppesen in Cathcart and Jeppesen 1987, 114). Renaud (1977, 436–39) avoids a decision by assuming the Hebrew word is a gloss. In view of the uncertainty regarding the meaning of this noun, a connection with an assumed illness of King Ahaz is premature (contra De Moor 2020, 308).

You will plant a hedge, / but you will not preserve anything. The word *tassēg* has been construed as a jussive of the verb *sûg,* Hi., "to remove (with the aim of keeping it safe)." Since this verb is intransitive, the proposal by van der Woude (1976, 233) to take the previous clause as a direct object clause—rendered by him "the seed in your body, when you eject it"—has no grounding in grammar. What items are removed for safekeeping according to this interpretation is still unclear. The proposal by Williamson (1997, 369), who assumes a denominative verb II, *sûg,* Hi., "to plant a hedge," however, gives more meaning to the line (see also Gignilliat 2019, 211).

The Hi. of the verb *pālaṭ* signifies "to save, to bring to security." The obvious meaning of the curse is to indicate that "setting apart for future use" will be of no help. The items set apart cannot be saved. In view of the fact that this clause too is to be read as a futility curse, there is no need to construe here a variant of the verb *bālaṭ,* "to live." A translation with "you will not bring to life" might accord with the idea that the noun *yĕšaḥ* refers to the seed of a man, but it does not make sense in connection with the idea of "removing, setting apart."

This second futility curse stating the loss of material possessions (Cruz 2016, 157–58) has no parallels in the Hebrew Bible or other ancient Near Eastern texts.

and what you do preserve, / I will give to the sword. This clause is not an explanation but a remark on the gravity of the impending material loss. Different from futility curses, this clause explicitly states that God is the subject of the action. He will give what had been preserved *laḥĕrèb,* "to the sword." This adverbial adjunct is a parallel to *baḥĕrèb,* "by the sword," which occurs as one of the ways in which God will punish those who do not keep his ordinances (Deut 28:22; Jer 16:4, 44:18; inverted in Jer 39:18). The image evoked is that of a conquering army that will annihilate the scarce hoards preserved in Israel (see Cruz 2016, 157–58).

6:15. *You will sow, / but you will not reap*. This curse is inverted in Ps 126:5 announcing a period of peace. In an undisturbed agricultural cycle, reaping is the expected outcome of sowing. However, the imminent blow will disrupt this order. The

topic occurs a few times in futility curses in the Hebrew Bible (Deut 28:38, Lev 26:16, Jer 12:13, Hag 1:6) and is attested in the bilingual inscription from Tell Fekherye (Abou-Assaf, Bordreuil, and Millard 1982; Assyrian, 30; Aramaic, 18–19; *CoS* 2.34; see Quick 2018, 71–76). In the fourth-century BCE wisdom of Ankh-Sheshonki the line occurs: "There is one who ploughs yet does not reap" (Ankh-Sheshonki: 17; Lichtheim 2006, 179). Elsewhere in the extrabiblical evidence this topic is not attested.

You will tread the olive, / but will not anoint yourself with oil. A few dozen olive presses from the Iron Age have been found in excavations, from Ḫurbat Rōš Zayit (Rās ez-Zētūn) in Lower Galilee (Gal and Frankel 1993) to Tel Miqne (Ekron) in Philistea (Eitam 1996; Maeir, Welch, and Eniukhina 2020). The production of olive oil was a complex procedure (Hopkins 1985, 230–32; Gal and Frankel 1993; Frankel 1999; Finkelstein and Langgut 2018). Treading the olives, referred to only here in the Hebrew Bible, should be construed as a traditional way of producing oil that by the time of Micah was already superseded by the technology of mortar and millstone. The author applies a saying from a bygone era. Olive oil was produced for two reasons. First, it was part of the daily diet in ancient Israel. The widow of Zarephath mixed olive oil with flour in the preparation of a cake (1 Kgs 17:11–12). Second, olive oil had a role in adornment and anointing. It was used as a cosmetic (Deut 28:40, 2 Sam 14:2, Ruth 3:3) and as an ingredient in the ritual by which a king, a prophet, or a priest was anointed to his task (e.g., Exod 28:14, 1 Sam 9:16, 1 Kgs 1:34; 11QT 22.15). Regardless of which of the two uses is implied in 6:15, an application by the elite is meant to be discontinued.

This futility curse has a parallel in Deut 28:40, which is, however, phrased differently: "You will have olive trees throughout your country but you will not use the oil, because the olives will drop off." This wording is more in line with the pattern: prepare but not eat. The twist in Mic 6:15 indicates an appropriation to the situation of social imbalance. In the succession treaty of Esarhaddon, the following curse is present: "may naphtha be your ointment, / may duckweed be your covering" (VTE = SAA 2.6: 490–91 = *CoS* 4.36). This announcement of punishment for breaking the treaty is not formulated as a futility curse but shows other ways the idea of such loss might be expressed.

and press, / but you will not drink wine. Traditionally, the noun *tîrôš,* "must," is seen as another object of the verb *rādak,* "to tread" (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 540; De Moor 2020, 311). Van der Woude (1976, 234) has correctly noted that "must" is the result of treading the grapes and never the object of the action. He proposes to construe the word as a *qal* imperfect of the verb II *yāraš,* "to press (grapes)," which is difficult to prove—the verb would elsewhere be attested only in 1QpMic 17.2—but nonetheless makes sense. Viticulture was an important element in ancient Israelite agriculture. After the harvest, the grapes were treaded by feet in a winepress (de Hulster 2009, 230–57). The disruption of this process would immediately influence the diet and health of the Israelites. The topic occurs a few times in futility curses in the Hebrew Bible (Deut 28:30, 39; Amos 5:1; Zeph 1:13), but as far as I can see it is absent in the extrabiblical evidence.

6:16. *For the statutes of Omri have been kept, / and all the work of the house of Ahab*. The *wāw copulativum* has causal force. The following clauses indicate the reason why God will send doom.

To those scholars who do not construe the first three clauses of 6:16 as a description of the cause of the coming punishment, these verses are in disorder. Van der

Woude (1976, 234–38), for instance, reads the lines as a description of an element of the impending destruction. He sees the verb form *yištammēr,* "have been kept," as a corruption of an original **yištammēd,* "will be eradicated." Although Hebrew *rēš* and *dāleth* are often misread for each other, the emendation does not hold since it is not supported by textual evidence. In addition, his remark that this reading finds support in the LXX is problematic: 6:16 LXX does not read *aphanistèsetai,* "and will be destroyed," but *efulaxas,* "you have observed," which partly supports the MT (Glenny 2015, 185) but also gave rise—together with the Vulgate *custodisti*—to the assumption that the MT should be corrected to *tišmor,* "you have kept" (Sellin 1922, 297; Mays 1976, 143; McKane 1998, 200–201). At the end of 6:15, however, the LXX reads *kai aphanistèsetai nomima laou mou,* "the laws (or ordinances) of my people will be eradicated." This would support the idea of van der Woude. This double rendering in the LXX might be explained by the assumption that the variant in 6:15 was part of the original LXX, while Theodotion added the correcting variant in 6:16 (see Utzschneider 2011, 2377–78; Glenny 2015, 183–85). Van der Woude further reads the nouns *ḥuqqôt* and *ma'ăśēh* not as "statutes and work," referring to ordinances and rules, but as "statues, idols, and manufacture." In his view, the lines refer to a forthcoming iconoclasm in northern Israel, hence the text must predate the conquest of Samaria. In my view, these exegetical acrobatics are unnecessary. First, neither of the two renderings in the LXX supports the interpretation of the words as material artifacts. Second, the audience of these lines is the ruling elite of Jerusalem to whom a mirror is held up. To the author, this elite has in a way copied the moral and religious aberrations of the kings of the Northern Kingdom. This path will lead to their decay. In my view, it would be better to keep the MT (with Waltke 2007, 404).

They have walked according to their disobedient acts. This parallel line underscores my interpretation. The noun II *mô'ēṣāh* refers to disobedience (Driver 1950, 411; see *DCH* 5:182; Jer 7:24; Pss 5:11, 81:13; contra the general reading of I *mô'ēṣāh,* "counsel," e.g., Shaw 1993, 163). This noun delegitimizes the acts of both the former kings of northern Israel and the leading elite in Jerusalem in the middle of the seventh century BCE.

Therefore, I will make you an object of horror. The compound particle *lema'an* has resultative force here (see Brongers 1973). What follows describes the effect for the Jerusalem elite of following the moral and religious policies of the Northern Kingdom.

The verb *nātan* with an object and an adverbial adjunct beginning with *le* should be rendered with "to make someone/something into." Here the theme of "change" recurs. God will change the status of the "you" character—the Jerusalem elite—from prosperous into horrific. The noun šammāh, "desolation, horror," is used, in its second meaning, to describe a situation of which God is ashamed (see Jer 5:30, 8:21). This punishment reminds one of a curse on those who would break the covenant relationship with God: "You will become a thing of horror (*šammāh*), a byword and an object of ridicule among all the peoples where YHWH will drive you" (Deut 28:37).

and her inhabitants an object of abhorrence. The condition of the inhabitants—of Jerusalem, I assume—will be diminished from a previous state of respectability to a profound debasement. Passing people will feel ashamed for them and even hiss at them in view of their debased condition. The noun *šĕrēqāh,* "(object of) abhorrence, hissing," occurs elsewhere to describe the result of divine punishment (Jer 18:16; 25:9, 18; 29:18).

You will bear the reproach of my people. This line summarizes the changed attitude toward the former elite. They have to accept the scorn of their compatriots. The suggestion by van der Woude (1976, 238) to see this line as a later gloss is far from convincing.

Comments

In reaction to the behavior of the elite, God will act in a way that brings illness, chaos, and destruction to the land. The character of the physical infirmity and psychological devastation to come (Cruz 2016, 154–55) is evoked with the language of the futility curses. The punishment is motivated by the observation that the enriched elite in Jerusalem acted in the same way as the horrible kings of the Northern Kingdom. Their fate—decay and destruction as described in 2 Kgs 17:1–6—awaits Jerusalem. There is no mention, however, of an impending Judaean exile, and any kind of hope for the period beyond doom is not provided.

Too many people feel their acts are futile and do not bring their expected outcome. This could make people forlorn and desperate. Blaming—the other, the powers that be, God—is a very human reaction. The author of Micah 6 summons the present readers, religious and nonreligious alike, to have a look at themselves and analyze their intentions.

Lamenting the Curse and Faith Against all Odds (7:1–7)

7 [1]Alas to me!
For I have become like one who,
when gathering the harvest fruit
or gleaning the grapes,
finds that there is no bunch to eat,
or a ripe fruit I could desire for myself.
[2]A loyal one is absent from the land
and there is no upright person among humankind.
All lie in wait for blood crimes;
a man hunts his brother with a net.
[3]Hands are qualified to do evil.
The prince and the judge ask for a requital.
A great man talks of his desire.
Thus they construct a case.
[4]The best of them is like a briar;
the most upright, a thorny hedge.
The day of those who watch over you, your visitation will come.
Now their confusion is present.
[5]You should better not rely on your companion
or trust your friend.
From the one who lies in your bosom,
guard the doorways of your mouth.
[6]For a son will have light esteem for a father.
A daughter will rise up against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against a mother-in-law.
The enemies of a man are his own household.

[7]But I will watch expectantly for YHWH.
I will await the God of my salvation.
My God will hear me.

Introduction

Micah 7:1–7 fits the composition of Micah 6–7 (see Cuffey 2015, 245–53; Gruber 2007). It constitutes a necessary stage in the development of the argument. The desolation described will be the result of the people not following the moral and social code of 6:8. The Hebrew of the section is not without its problems, although text-critical interventions are not necessary. Some elements might be the result of a later addition (for instance, "your visitation will come"; see van der Woude 1976, 241).

In my view, verse 7 is an integral part of the section (see also Sellin 1922, 301–2; Nogalski 1993a, 144–53; Kessler 1999, 284–93; Ben Zvi 2000, 165–73; Gruber 2007, 2). The declaration of trust in God is connected to the observation of the vanishing of piety in verse 3 (Rudolph 1975, 120–26; van der Woude 1976, 240–47; Hillers 1984, 83–86; Jeremias 2007, 212–18; Gignilliat 2019, 213–21). Furthermore, the repetition of the verb *ṣāpāh,* "to watch," in verse 7 forms a link with verse 4. In 7:8–13, the "I" character is female, while in 7:1–7 this character is clearly male (see Notes at 7:10). In addition, 7:7 makes no sense as a starting point of an assumed section 7:7–13 (*pace* Gunkel 1924, 147; Mays 1976, 156–57; R. L. Smith 1984, 54–55; Jenson 2008, 179; De Bruin 2020, 329–30). On the basis of observations on unit delimiters in ancient manuscripts, De Moor (2000; 2020, 330–34) proposes to read 7:7–8 as the second subcanto in 7:1–13. Some scholars see double duty in the words of 7:7 and construe the verse as a hinge between verses 1–6 and verses 8–10 (Hagstrom 1988, 97–98; Jacobs 2001, 94–95; Waltke 2007, 415–31; Banister 2018, 28–29). Finally, 7:1–7 opens and ends with first-person clauses (Dempster 2017, 173). O'Brien (2015, 102–9) construes 7:1–10 to be a unit. Willi-Plein (1971, 104–6) splits 7:1–7 into two units: verse 1–4 and verses 5–7.

Notes

7:1. *Alas to me!* The interjection *'allay,* "alas, woe," is attested only here and at Job 10:15. It functions in a comparable way to the interjections *hôy* and *'ôy* as the expression of a mourning cry (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §40.2.4). This also implies that the traditional three elements—address, accusation, and announcement—are not clearly detectable in 7:1–7 (Westermann 1964, 137–42; Janzen 1972). The effect of the announcement is spelled out.

For I have become like one who, / when gathering the harvest fruit / or gleaning the grapes. The "I" character compares his postdestruction situation with an atypical post-harvest situation. Wine and fruit were important parts of the ancient Israelite diet (MacDonald 2008, 19–31; O'Brien 2015, 103).

finds that there is no bunch to eat, / or a ripe fruit I could desire for myself. This description applies the futility curse of 6:15 to the forthcoming reality. As the harvest will be in vain, the life of the "I" character will be empty and futile. This human "I" character seems to function as a collective for all those who followed the moral and religious path outlined in 6:8 but were frustrated by the egocentric conduct of their compatriots.

7:2. *A loyal one is absent from the land*. The adjective *ḥāsîd,* "loyal," is used as a collective noun. In combination with the verb *'ābad,* "to go astray, lose," the hyperbolic idea is introduced that the land is empty of good people or people of goodwill.

and there is no upright person among humankind. In this line, the *yāšār,* "upright," stands parallel to the "loyal" and has a comparable collective function. The expression *bā'ādām,* "among humankind," stands parallel to "in the land." As in Mic 6:8 and Ps 124:2, *'ādām* does not refer to the personal name "Adam" but should be construed as a collective noun (*DCH* 1:123–26). In view of the parallelism, it has been suggested that the word be read *bā'ādāmāh,* "in the land," with a loss of the original final *hē* (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 568). The absence of support for this reading in the ancient translations, as well as the poetic effect of the parallel "land" // "humankind," works against this reading.

All lie in wait for blood crimes. Strawn (2005, 334) correctly compares this expression with a lion lying in wait for an ambush, lurking for the blood of another animal.

a man hunts his brother with a net. In this parallel line, the author applies the metaphor to the cruelty of the economic exploitation described in 6:10–12. Hunting was an infrequently used way to provide for food (see for instance Esau as a hunter Gen 27:3, 5; MacDonald 2008, 34). In the Hebrew Bible, the verb *ṣûd* is also used metaphorically for hunting down humans (Jer 16:16, Ps 140, Job 10:16) and once for the way in which a woman goes after a man who is not her husband (Prov 6:26). The literary topos is generally ancient Near Eastern (Dempster 2017, 175). A *ḥērèm,* "net," was generally used for catching fish or birds (Ezek 26:5, 14; 32:3; 47:10; Hab 1:15–17; Qoh 7:26; 1QpHab 5.13–14). Since the language here is of an imaginary character, there is no need to argue in favor of van der Woude's (1976, 244) view that *ḥērèm* here ought to be translated "with affliction" (cf. LXX *ekthlibèi*) because the verb *ṣûd* is never used for hunting with a net. Furthermore, there is no evidence in the ancient versions that supports a transposition of *ḥērèm* to the beginning of verse 3 and reading the word as *hārēm,* "lifting up" (contra De Moor 2020, 342–43).

7:3. *Hands are qualified to do evil*. This expression clearly hints at the system of corruption. As elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Deut 5:18, Jer 1:12), the verb *yāṭab* in the Hi. can have the meaning "to be well-equipped to," implying in Mic 7:3 that the concaved hands of the elite are well trained to receive facilitation payments.

The prince and the judge ask for a requital. The noun *śar,* "prince, magistrate, commander," can be used for a variety of people of power in the higher echelons of the administration. That person does not have to be of royal blood. A *šōpēṭ,* "judge," was an important person in the judicial process with the power to make decisions (Niehr 1986). Both were supposed to be fair and impartial, yet they ask for a *šillûm,* "compensation, requital," which is to be compared with a *šōḥad,* "bribe" (see 3:11). In Mic 7:3 too, it is the weak who will suffer from the effects of corruption (Boloje 2018, 644–45).

A great man talks of his desire. The adjective *gādôl,* "great," is here substantivized and refers to a person of great importance in the community. The expression "to talk of the desire" refers to openly heralding what the outcome of a judicial process will be.

Thus they construct a case. The verb *'ābat,* "to weave," occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible. It refers to the unjust assemblage of a judicial case such that the outcome certainly will be in favor of the more important person. The case is woven on the warp

and woof of the requital. Since the MT makes sense, there is no need to restore this line, in combination with the first clause of 7:4, to an assumed more original text, such as "and they abhor the best among them like a brier" (De Moor 2020, 343–44).

7:4. *The best of them is like a briar*. The construction of an adjective with a suffix indicating the *genetivus partitivus* hints at the fact that the adjective should be read as a superlative (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §14.5). A *ḥēdèq,* "briar, dog's rose," is a parasite that slowly throttles the trees around which it winds itself. The shrub has sharp, hooked prickles that cause traumatic lesions. In Prov 15:19, the shrub is mentioned to criticize the ways of a sluggard. The image evoked is that of a parasite that prevents a tree from blossoming (Waltke 2007, 420); it is used as a metaphor for the bribing elite enfeebling the community.

the most upright, a thorny hedge. This line too mocks the elite by stating that the most upright member of them is no better than a *měsûkāh,* "hedge." The parallelism with *ḥēdèq,* "briar," suggests that this shrub too was thorny (thus van der Woude 1976, 246; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 571). Since the noun occurs only in Mic 7:4, this assumption cannot be tested.

The day of those who watch over you, your visitation will come. The descriptive mourning cry changes into an announcement of doom addressed to the bribing elite. The *participium* Pi. *měṣappèkā* refers to those who are on the lookout for Jerusalem's destruction. In view of the length of this line, the word *pĕquddātkā,* "your visitation," might very well be an explanatory gloss qualifying what will come over Jerusalem (van der Woude 1976, 241, 246). The noun refers to the self-determined destiny of the elite (see André 1980). The verb form *bā'āh,* "will come," is to be construed as a *stativus* with a function comparable to that of the *participium* and in view of the hymnic style should be read as an indication of the impending future.

Now their confusion is present. The adverb *'attāh,* "now," indicates that the coming destruction will be foreshadowed in the now of the speaker. The forthcoming doom already creates disturbance. The 3.m.p. suffix refers to "those who watch over you" and should be interpreted as a *genitivus objectivus:* "the confusion created by them."

7:5. *You should better not rely on your companion*. This verse depicts the dire situation from a different perspective. In good and normal times, trust in those around you is a binding agent for a community. Confiding in close relatives, too, strengthens the fabric of society. All this is broken by the conduct of the elite. A *rēa',* "companion," could turn out to be untrustworthy. This is a perennial problem of wartime and periods of heavy contrasts in a society.

or trust your friend. The noun *'allûp* could refer to a "chief" (as for instance in Gen 36, Exod 15:15, Zech 9:7) or an "intimate friend" (see, e.g., Jer 3:4, 13:21; Ps 55:14; Prov 16:28). The third possibility, "cow" (as in Ps 144:14, Sir 38:25), makes no sense in this context. In view of the parallelism with *rēa'*, "companion," the second possibility is to be preferred (Shaw 1993, 165; Bendor 1996, 251).

From the one who lies in your bosom. This expression indicates the most intimate other, male or female, but the feminine *participium* hints at the fact that a woman is meant (van der Woude 1976, 247).

guard the doorways of your mouth. The author reapplies a traditional wisdom saying, "Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, / but those who speak rashly will

come to ruin" (Prov 13:3; see also Ps 34:14), to the situation of a torn society where every word could be one too many (Korpel and De Moor 2011, 91).

7:6. *For a son will have light esteem for a father*. The conjunction *kî,* "for," presents the description of a broken family as the argument for not trusting someone who is near and dear (Schoors 1981). The Pi. of the verb *nābal,* "to be foolish," means "to spurn, dishonor," or even "to declare void" (Gerleman 1974b). The line hints at an inversion of the traditional order, in which sons "honor" their fathers (Exod 20:12, Lev 19:32, Deut 5:6).

A daughter will rise up against her mother. The expression *qûm* + *bĕ,* "to rise up against," suggests a daughter disagreeing with her mother and subverting her authority. Here too, the traditional order in which daughters had to "obey" their mothers is broken.

a daughter-in-law against a mother-in-law. Within the traditional Israelite family, a *kallāh,* "daughter-in-law," was under the authority of her mother-in-law (see the book of Ruth). By rising up against her, the daughter-in-law inverts that order.

The enemies of a man are his own household. The *'anšê bayit,* "household," refers to distant relatives, servants, and slaves who support the economy of the "house" or "farm." There is no need to construe with Bendor (1996, 251) a reference to a *bêt 'āb* of three generations here. The line indicates the change in conduct of those who were supposed to be loyal to one of enmity.

This verse brings the calamity to the level of the family. Trust and loyalty have collapsed, resulting in broken relationships where the harshness of egoism supplants expected solidarity. Andersen and Freedman (2000, 573–74) correctly remark that the image of the distortion of family relations is a common motif in ancient Near Eastern texts:

> A son will not ask after the health of his father
> nor the father of his son's.
> A mother will happily
> plot harm for her daughter.
> (Erra Epic II i: Rev. 61; *CoS* 1.113)

> I shall change men's hearts that a father will listen to a son
> A daughter will speak words of rejection to the mother
> (Erra Epic III i: 9–10; *CoS* 1.113; see De Moor 2020, 346–47)

These lines in the Epic of Erra are part of the description of the devastation of the world and humanity that will come about because of Erra's reaction to the trespasses of the people. In the Egyptian Admonitions of Ipuwer, the same motif is present: "A man looks upon his son as his enemy" (Admonitions of Ipuwer I:5; *CoS* 1.42).

The inscriptions of Esarhaddon depict the moral decay of Babylon before its destruction in the time of Sennacherib:

> the people living in it (Babylon) answered each other Yes, (in their heart): No!; they plotted evil . . . they (the Babylonians) were oppressing the weak/poor and putting them into the power of the mighty, there was oppression and acceptance of bribe within the city daily without ceasing; they were robbing each other's property; the son was cursing his father in the street . . . then

the god (Enlil/Marduk) became angry, he planned to overwhelm the land and to destroy its people. (Esarhaddon Text 1 08 = Ep. 3, a, b, c: 7–14; see Leichty 2011, 219–21; De Moor 2020, 348–49)

The theme of disruption is also present in the Ugaritic Kirtu legend (*KTU* 1.16 vi: 25–38; De Moor 2020, 348). Ancient Near Eastern texts also refer to incantations against estrangement within families as listed in the diviner's guide *šurpu* II 20–28 (Reiner 1958, 13; De Moor 2020, 349). This reversal of the family order is comparable to descriptions of a "bad time" in Akkadian literary predictive texts mentioned in the Introduction. The theme of distorted family relations, however, is absent in these texts. The closest parallel I could find is in Text A: "[. . .] the mother will speak what is right (*kittu)* to her daughter" (*KAR* 421 Rev. ii: 17; Grayson and Lambert 1964, 14; Longman 1991, 242). In view of the context in *KAR* 421 that describes the reign of a bad prince, *kittu* must be construed as a negative thing that breaks down the order of loyalty in the family.

The theme as such is adapted in later apocalyptic writings as a sign of the chaos and distress before the end of all things:

> But the city of my righteous shall be a hindrance to their horses.
> And they shall begin to fight among themselves,
> And their right hand shall be strong against themselves,
> And a man shall not know his brother,
> Nor a son his father or his mother.
>
> (1 En. 56.7; see also 1 En. 100.2, Jub. 23.16; Grelot 1986, 367–70; Jenson2008, 181)

Matthew 10:34–36 adapts this theme when the author has Jesus saying (without any reference to Micah; see Willi-Plein 1971, 106; Grelot 1986, 363–67; Menken 2004, 244–47; O'Brien 2015, 106–7; Roukema 2019, 7–8; see also Luke 12:53): "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household." The Gospel of Thomas contains an echo of the saying, with Jesus saying: "Men think, perhaps, that it is peace which I have come to cast upon the world. They do not know that it is dissension which I have come to cast upon the earth: fire, sword, and war. For there will be five in a house: three will be against two, and two against three, the father against the son, and the son against the father. And they will stand solitary" (Gospel of Thomas §16; see Roukema 2019, 35).

7:7. *But I will watch expectantly for YHWH*. The *wāw* copulative has adversative force and evokes a contrast between elite and prophet (Waltke 2007, 429; De Bruin 2020, 286). As in Lam 4:17, the Pi. of the verb *ṣāpāh,* "to watch, look," expresses a form of hopeful watching. The line contains a contrast with 7:4, where the verb *ṣāpāh* is used to indicate those who watch for the destruction of the city.

I will await the God of my salvation. The verb form in the parallel line—*yāḥal,* Hi., "to (a)wait"—expresses the same kind of trustful hope. Amidst the crisis at the level of society and the family and against all odds, the "I" character put his hope in God. Faith in a deliverance by God is expressed. The line itself gives no hint as to the character of

that salvation, but the context makes clear that this traditional element of the Yahwistic belief system is applied to the situation full of doom described in the previous verses.

My God will hear me. God's hearing with attentiveness is frequently described in the Hebrew Bible. It is one of the ways in which his compassion is expressed. The other more frequent expression is that of God's "seeing" Israel's trouble. Both sensory perceptions lead to acts of liberation out of troubled situations, as for instance the exodus out of Egypt or the return of Naomi from her exile in Moab. In his discouraging times, the "I" character does not abandon this element of Israelite faith.

Comments

These seven verses, Mic 7:1–7, molded after the pattern of a mourning cry, present two themes. First, the section describes the sorrowful situation after the fatal blow that is announced in 6:13. Various images make clear that the land will be turned into a desolation. Three themes are presented: (1) The land can be compared with the emptiness of a failed harvest; (2) piety has turned into self-preservation and a further dismantling of the social order, both based on pure egoism; and (3) the fabric of the family as a caring unit has been torn, resulting in ruthless opposition and callous discrepancies. This dreary depiction of a community in ruin is connected with the theme of trust. The "I" character has stopped having confidence in the human beings around him and will rely only on God.

Micah 7:1–7 spells out a contrast. As a result of the impending blow, societal and familial relations of trust will be broken into pieces. This will bring Israel into dire straits (O'Brien 2015, 103–4). As an effect of doom and decay, the elements of hope and trust will evaporate. As a result, Israelites will be left to their own desperate loneliness. In sharp contrast stands the piety of the "I" character. Despite everything, he will keep up his faith in God. This attitude—to some, one that is naïve and unsophisticated—stands parallel to the pattern of moral behavior in 6:8. Against the tides of time, the conviction of a caring God will remain. The author of Micah 6–7 summons the present reader not to drown in misery but to keep a realistic eye on the possibilities of the future.

The Depth of Salvation (7:8–13)

7 [8]Do not rejoice over me, my enemy.
Although I have fallen,
I will rise.
Although I dwell in darkness,
YHWH is my light!
[9]I will bear the rage of YHWH,
since I have sinned against him,
until he pursues my suit
and executes justice for me.
He will bring me out to the light.
I will look for his vindication.
[10]May my enemy see,
may shame cover her
who said to me:
"Where is YHWH your God?"
My eyes will look down on her;
thereupon she will be a trampling place, like mud in the street.
[11]A day is coming when your walls will be strengthened.
That day the order of things will be far away.
[12]That day your attacker will come to you
to divide Assyria and the fortified cities,
to divide from rock to river,
from sea to sea,
from mountain to mountain.
[13]The land shall become like a devastation
before the eyes of its inhabitants,
for the fruits of their deeds.

Introduction

Micah 7:8–13 contains two elements: (1) an expression of confidence (7:8–10) and (2) an oracle of doom for the enemy (7:11–13). The view of Gunkel (1924) that both were part of a prophetic liturgy is not convincing. Micah 7:11–13 is not to be construed as an oracle of salvation (see van der Woude 1976, 253–58; contra Dempster 2017, 18–81) but as an oracle of doom for the grammatically feminine enemy; the oracle of salvation follows in verses 14–17. By implication, verses 11–13 do not function as a motivation for the confidence uttered in verses 8–10. Furthermore, indications of liturgical use are absent from this unit.

The historical location of the unit is disputed. Earlier scholars (still Nogalski 2010) dated Mic 7:7–20 with not much argument to the Maccabean age. Since Gunkel (1924), who hinted at various connections with Third Isaiah, many scholars have connected this section with the exilic/early postexilic period, at a time when Jerusalem was conquered but the walls had not yet been rebuilt (Nehemiah; see Schütte 2016, 110–11). Van der Woude (1976, 249), however, argued for a background during the last years before the fall of Samaria. He bases this mainly on the mention of Carmel, Bashan, and Gilead as conquered territories (7:14), while Samaria was not yet sacked. Willis (1974) adopted this view but hinted at the following: (1) there is a series of ambiguities in the unit making the identity of the enemy unclear; and (2) there are many intertextual links between Mic 7:7–20 and chapter 10 of the Judaean prophet Isaiah, where the doom for the Northern Kingdom is presented as a warning for the leaders in Judah. Willis then proposes that the Micahian oracle was reapplied to a later Judaean situation: an original oracle was redacted in order to fit the new context. I go one step farther by assuming that there was no earlier text from the eighth century BCE and that the author of Micah 6–7 composed this unit in the years preceding the reforms of Josiah while using the fate of Samaria as a warning sign.

The present text of Micah 7:8–13 is not in disorder, and there are no features that would hint at the necessity to assume redactional layers.

Notes

7:8. *Do not rejoice over me, my enemy*. In ancient times, but also today, military victors are inclined to mock a conquered nation. In their annals, the Neo-Assyrian kings gloated over their victories. Traces of this debasing custom are found in the Hebrew Bible (see for instance 2 Sam 1:20; Obad 12; Pss 35:19, 24; 38:17). The "I" character in Micah asks his enemy to spare him this. The word *ʾōyabtî,* "my enemy," is a feminine noun with a 1.c.s. suffix. Her identity is disputed. Scholars dating the unit to the Babylonian exile tend to connect her with Edom (Obadiah, Ps 137). Van der Woude (1976, 251–52) construes her to be Assyria (however, compare Nogalski 2010, who has in mind an Assyria as it is remembered in the tradition). Willis (1974) argues that it is part of the strength of the section that her identity cannot be unveiled. Various scholars opt for the view that the word refers to a collective enemy (R. L. Smith 1984, 58; Hillers 1984, 87). De Bruin (2020, 330) considers a personal enemy of the prophet instead of an inimical nation, which does not make much sense in view of the martial language in the rest of the pericope. In view of the fact that in the contemporary book of Nahum,

Assyria is often referred to as a feminine person, the forces of Ashurbanipal could be behind this word.

Although I have fallen, / I will rise. The character of the fall is not mentioned. In view of the context, a military collapse or the falling apart of the community are the more plausible options. Most important is the message that this fall will not be the end of Israel's existence. The verb *qûm,* "to rise," does not have the connotation of a resurrection after death but hints at a recovery from a seemingly hopeless situation (van der Woude 1976, 252). In fact, this clause, as well as the following one, contains a reversal of the futility clause: although the acts of the enemy seem to have closed off the future, the person will find a new life.

Although I dwell in darkness, / YHWH *is my light!* The metaphorical use of the noun *ḥōšèk,* "darkness," hints at the human experience of total despair and misery. The image is often applied in the book of Job and Psalms to describe a life characterized by hopelessness. The "I" character confesses that God is nevertheless like an *'ôr,* "light," bringing hope in dark times. The predicate is not yet personified as in later Hellenistic Judaism but refers to the belief that God's light will liberate from misery (Breytenbach 1971). These two lines can be construed as parallel to the twofold futurology underlying Micah 2–5: decay but later liberation.

7:9. *I will bear the rage of* YHWH. The verb *nāśā',* generally "to lift, to carry," has in this verse the connotation "to bear, suffer, endure" (*DCH* 5:765). God has to endure human evil (but sometimes has his fill of it; Jer 44:22). Humans have to suffer their decay (for instance Elamites in Ezek 32:24–25, Ephraim in Jer 31:19, Jacob in Ezek 39:26, Jerusalem in Jer 10:19). "Bearing" is an act of acceptance. The noun *za'ap,* "anger," is one of the eleven Hebrew words for "wrath, rage," all indicating the fierce, emotional reaction of God to human trespassing. On many occasions, God is seen as angry with Israel, but sometimes God's wrath functions to protect his people when they are cornered by their enemies (Nahum). In Mic 7:9, the first possibility is obviously meant (Waltke 2007, 434).

since I have sinned against him. By implication, the "I" character accepts that it was his transgressions that evoked God's anger. In doing so, this "I" character takes on the transgressions of the leaders as depicted in the previous section. In this act of substitution, he acts in solidarity with the rest of God's people and does not loftily place himself on higher moral ground. McKane (1998, 219) considers this line to be a parenthesis. Construing it as a later explanation removes the reason for the rage of YHWH from the original text.

until he pursues my suit. In line with the LXX, *dikayóo,* "to justify, vindicate," a majority of modern translations renders this clause as "until He pleads my case." In doing so, the verb *rîb,* "to strive, conduct a lawsuit," is construed as having a positive outcome for the "I" character beforehand. The verb *rîb* seems to have this meaning in 1 Sam 24:16. A close reading of that verse, however, makes clear that the positive outcome is present only in the last clause, "he will deliver me from your hand," while "dispute my dispute" is neutral and not prematurely interfering with a judgment, as in Mic 7:9.

and executes justice for me. This clause is parallel to the previous one and expresses the same concept. The noun *mišpāṭ,* "justice," refers in the Hebrew Bible to redemption but sometimes to a guilty verdict. This ambiguity functions as a means of suspension until the help of God for the "I" character is revealed.

He will bring me out to the light. Here, the belief in God's rescue is expressed. The verb *yāṣā',* Hi., "to bring out," is often used of the liberation out of Egypt (Exodus, Deutero-Isaiah; see Groß 1974). Since the verb can be used to describe all sorts of releases and movements (see for instance 1 Kgs 17:13, 1 Chr 9:28, Neh 6:19, Job 12:22), there is no need to interpret this "bringing out to the light" as a liberation out of the bondage of exile (contra van der Woude 1976, 252). The noun *'ôr,* "light," stands metaphorically for a life of freedom and happiness. In two Neo-Babylonian letters, the expression *ana nūri šūṣu,* "to liberate," provides a nice parallel (BIN I 36:23; UET 4 184:15; see *CAD* A/2, 372; De Moor 2020, 352).

I will look for his vindication. The verb *rā'āh,* "to see," with the preposition *be* expresses looking forward to something that it is hoped will happen. The "I" character is not so much looking at or indulging in the outcome of God's righteousness (contra van der Woude 1976, 252–53) as waiting for God's decision to happen.

7:10. *May my enemy see*. With Andersen and Freedman (2000, 584), I construe the verb form as a jussive expressing the wish of the "I" character. This "I" character should be seen as the prophet representing the whole of the community. Interestingly, the verb *rā'āh,* "to see," is not connected with an object. The LXX and Vulgate also lack an object. Most probably the outcome of God's intervention is meant as object, but this interpretation is far from certain.

may shame cover her. Here too, the jussive indicates the wish of the "I" character. When the enemy gets acquainted with God's plans, he will be ashamed. The noun *bûšāh,* "shame," refers to a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of one's wrong or foolish behavior (see Stiebert 2002; Lemos 2006).

who said to me: / "Where is YHWH *your God?"* This insulting question mocks both God and his people. Questioning the presence of YHWH challenges God's role in history by assuming that he was unable to protect his people. On the other hand, the statement of divine absence is a form of subverting the fundamentals of the faith of the "I" character. The question as such is at home in the dirge of the people. In Joel 2:17 (see also Ps 79:10), the priests are invited to complain to God in a prayer:

> Spare your people, YHWH.
> Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn,
> a byword among the nations.
> Why should they say among the peoples,
> "Where is their God?"

A comparable theme is present in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle. After the death of Baal, the Storm God is mourned: "Where is mighty Baal? / Where is the Prince, the Lord of the earth?" (*KTU* 1.6 iv: 4–5, 15–16; *CoS* 1, 102; see Burnett 2010, 4–5). The MT is intriguing, as the word *'ĕlōhāyik,* "your God," has a feminine suffix, implying that the "I" figure in this unit was construed as a woman, which would be unique in the book of Micah. This opens up the possibility that either someone other than Micah was envisioned—for instance the city of Jerusalem (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 567; Ben Zvi 2000, 168) or the collective inhabitants of Judah (Runions 2001, 177)—or that Micah is construed as having a feminine side (Gruber 2007). This view is challenged by De Moor (2000). According to him, the speaking voices in Mic 7:1–6 and 7–10 must have been the same person. Since it is obvious that the speaking voice

in verses 1–6 is a male person, the word *'elōhāyik* is problematic in his perception. Already in 1963, De Moor had published his discovery that in two Hebrew manuscripts, the form *'ĕlōhêkā* is attested with a masculine suffix. Research in an abundance of Hebrew manuscripts made clear that about 35 percent of these manuscripts read the form with a masculine suffix (De Moor 2000, 167; 2020, 353–55). This argument seems impressive. The presence of a masculine suffix could also be interpreted as an exegetical adaptation in these manuscripts. The female enemy in Micah 7 treats Israel as if her God were almost dead. Gruber (2007) elaborates upon the presence of the feminine suffix, proposing to construe Micah 6–7 as written by a female author. Such an elaboration is unnecessary. In Mesopotamia, texts are found that contain an ambiguity regarding gender of a "prophet" (see Nissinen 2017, 308–9). It might be that in confrontation with the feminine enemy, the "I" character of Micah 7 had to show its feminine side.

My eyes will look down on her. The verb *rā'āh,* "to see," is repeated, but with an inverted direction of gaze. Now, the "I" character is looking down on his former enemy. There is no mention of gloating as a counterpart to the joy of the enemy in verse 8.

thereupon she will be a trampling place, like mud in the street. As in Mic 4:11, *'attāh* has the function of introducing a new section or a new thought as in English "next, thereupon." A *mirmās,* "trampling place," is mentioned a few times in the Hebrew Bible. For example, in the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah, the fate of the disobedient vineyard is characterized through the language of reversal: it will be devastated and become a trampling place (Isa 5:5). In Micah 7, a comparable reversal is present. The *ṭîṭ,* "clay," elsewhere a resource for building blocks, will in the future be reduced to *ṭîṭ,* "mud," as it covers streets. In sum, the once proud enemy will be turned into that which is worthless in its humiliation (Waltke 2007, 437).

7:11. With van der Woude (1976, 253–58), I read verses 11–13 as a prophecy of doom directed toward the female enemy. Within the composition of Micah 6–7, this makes more sense than the traditional view that verses 11–13 are an oracle of salvation regarding the rebuilding and restoration of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile (for instance Willi-Plein 1971, 107–8; Renaud 1977, 482–83; Westermann 1987, 83; McKane 1998, 222–29; Runions 2001, 177). An oracle of doom for the enemy is a more fluent continuation of the theme of the reversal of Assyria's fate. It should be noted that the LXX construed these verses this way (see Glenny 2015, 203–7).

A day is coming when your walls will be strengthened. A *gādēr,* "wall, fence," is a construction outside a city that functions as a first line of defense. The identification of such a *gādēr* with the wall of Jerusalem that was restored under Nehemiah (proposed by a vast majority of scholars; see Rudolph 1975, 132–33; but see the remarks in Willi-Plein 1971, 107–8) is far from certain, as is its identification with the "broad wall" built by Hezekiah around the time of the siege of Sennacherib (contra De Moor 2020, 356). In Nehemiah a different word, *ḥûmāh,* "city wall," is used.

The verb *bānāh* does not mean in this context "to (re)build" (for instance Sellin 1922, 301; Hillers 1984, 87; Nogalski 1993a, 37; Jeremias 2007, 219; De Moor 2020, 356), but as in 1 Kgs 12:25 and 15:22, "to strengthen" (van der Woude 1976, 254). The expression *yôm lĕ,* just like *'ēt lĕ,* "a time to . . ." (for instance Ps 102:14, Qoh 3), refers to a coming time when strengthening the defensive walls will be a necessity for the feminine enemy, since she will be the object of sieges.

That day the order of things will be far away. The proposal of van der Woude (1976, 255) to read *yôm hahawwā',* "day of perdition," is not convincing, although it solves the problem of incongruence. There is no support, however, from the ancient versions for this suggestion. The traditional interpretation of this line—that it contains a promise of an enlargement of the territory of Judah after the exile (Sellin 1922, 301–3; Rudolph 1975, 132–33; Jeremias 2007, 219–27), after the siege of Sennacherib (De Moor 2020, 357), or at an unknown point in time (Hillers 1984, 90–91)—needs to be challenged. The verb *rāḥaq,* "to be distant," in the *qal* is a descriptive verb and not a verb indicating movement, as implied in the translation "will be enlarged."

The noun *ḥōq* has a broad semantic range, but central to all possible meanings is the notion of a "norm, order." I read this clause with van der Woude (1976, 255) as a prophecy against Assyria that in days to come the traditional order will be beyond the horizon and that the Assyrians will have nothing to base a claim upon in the time of impending reversal.

7:12. *That day your attacker will come to you*. Elaborating on the observation that the verb form *yābô',* "he will come," lacks a clear subject, van der Woude (1976, 255–56) proposed construing *'ādêkā* not as a preposition with suffix, but as a noun with suffix: "your robber" (adopted by De Moor 2020, 357). A verb *'ādāh,* "to rob," as van der Woude assumes, does not exist, however. I therefore suggest a connection with the noun **'adî,* "attack" (*DCH* 6:280–81; see De Moor 2020, 357) and render with "your attacker."

to divide Assyria and the fortified cities. Both the standard translation "from Assyria to the cities of Egypt" (see Rudolph 1975, 127; Nogalski 1993a, 37; McKane 1998, 229; Smith-Christopher 2015, 214; De Moor 2020, 357) and its interpretation—the text refers to a return of exiles from all corners of the world (thus Sellin 1922, 301–2)—are not without problems. The construction *lĕmin . . . wĕ'ad,* "from . . . to," always assumes a descending order: "from earlier to later, from great to small." It should be noted that *lĕmin* is not followed by *wĕ'ad* in 7:12. In addition, the phrasing *lĕminnî* is slightly archaic. The use of *māṣôr* for Egypt instead of *miṣrayîm* is curious (the noun occurs in this meaning only in the expression "the Nile—arms of Egypt"; Isa 19:6, 37:25 = 2 Kgs 19:24). I therefore propose not translating with "Egypt" (see also Kessler 1999, 295). The relatively free translation of the LXX has rendered *lĕminnî* with *eis diamerismon,* "to a dividing" (see Glenny 2015, 206–7), which led van der Woude (1976, 256–57) to the vocalization **lĕmannê . . . ,* "to divide Assyria and (its) fortified cities." I adopt this view, since it clearly expresses the aim of the "attacker."

to divide from rock to river. The vocalization of *leminnî* as **lĕmannê* makes sense. The LXX again has *eis diamerismon,* "to a dividing." The word *māṣôr* was apparently read by the LXX as *miṣṣôr,* "from Tyre," with the preposition *min* (Rudolph 1975, 127). With van der Woude (1976, 257), I read *miṣṣûr,* "from (a) rock," and construe the expression as a merism for all the territory between barren rocks and the fertile land around the rivers (see also Brongers 1965b; to be preferred over *Festung,* Kessler 1999, 294–95). The whole area of the feminine enemy will be conquered, split up, and given to others.

from sea to sea, / from mountain to mountain. This double merism indicates the extent of the territorial loss that awaits Assyria.

7:13. *The land shall become like a devastation*. The noun *'ereṣ,* "earth, land," does not refer to the "earth" in its entirety, but solely to Assyrian territory (van der Woude 1976, 257–58). The noun *šemāmāh,* "desolation," indicates a reversal of fates. The author of Micah 6–7 makes a connection with 1:7, where Israel's divine images will be turned into a desolation. The once splendid Assyrian Empire will be turned into a place of waste and agony.

before the eyes of its inhabitants, / for the fruits of their deeds. The preposition *'al,* is generally construed as having motivative force: "because" (note that Andersen and Freedman [2000] render it more neutrally with "and"). With van der Woude (1976, 258), I construe this preposition as a shorter form for *'al pĕnê,* "in front of." This implies that the inhabitants of Assyria will have to witness the downfall of their country. The preposition *min* in the final clause motivates the impending devastation: the collapse of the feminine enemy is the final result of the deeds and doings of its leaders.

Comments

Micah 7:8–13 is a very moving section that touches on the depths of pain and joy, punishment and salvation. A triangle is assumed: the "I" character, a feminine enemy, and the God of Israel. The internal relations are in a process of movement. As a result of transgressions, God had punished Israel with occupation by a feminine enemy. Assyria, however, had overreached its hand by rejoicing over the fate of Israel. The tides will turn again: Assyria will become prey to destruction and desolation.

History, however, is not schematic. The relations between nations are not as sober as the movements of pawns in a game of chess. The changes between the players in the triangle involve deeply felt emotions: joy, awe, rage, love, solitude, and destruction. The road to salvation is certainly not an easy path. The route is more like a walk through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps 23:4).

A New Shepherd (7:14–17)

7 [14]Shepherd your people with your staff
—the flock of your inheritance—
let it dwell in isolation in a forest
in the middle of an orchard.
May they pasture in Bashan and Gilead
as in ancient days.
[15]As in the days of your going out of the land of Egypt
I will show him wonders.
[16]The nations will see and be ashamed
despite all their strength.
They shall hold hand before mouth,
their ears will be deafened.
[17]They will lick dust like a serpent,
like reptiles on the earth, they will come quaking out of their dungeons.
To YHWH, our God, they will come in dread,
and they shall fear you.

Introduction

Micah 7:14–17 contains two elements: a prayer to God to shepherd his people and lead them into prosperity (v. 14; Jenson 2008, 186) and a description of the embarrassed reaction of the nations to God's intervention on behalf of his people (vv. 16–17). The two parts are connected by the memory of the liberation from Egypt. The unit perfectly follows the previous section: the debasement of Assyria will run parallel to salvation for Judah. In my view, the unit fits in the time frame before the reforms of Josiah, although it has often been dated later (in the final days of the exile/early period after the return; De Moor 2020, 365–71). Some scholars read this unit as a prayer for the restoration of the Northern Kingdom and date it to the late eighth century BCE (van der Woude

1976, 258–63; Vargon 2009). The Hebrew text gives no immediate cause for text-critical interventions.

Notes

7:14. *Shepherd your people with your staff*. The imperative *rĕʿēh* summons God to lead his people. In the ancient Near East, gods, and by implication kings, were often seen as shepherds over their nations. Their task was to bring the people to prosperity and guide them through rough times. The same is true for the Hebrew Bible, where kings are idealized as shepherds and where YHWH is seen as the "good shepherd" (see for instance Pss 23, 80:2; Isa 4:11; Ezek 34; Hunziker-Rodewald 2001; O'Brien 2015, 115; Varhaug 2019).

The meaning of the noun *šēbèṭ,* "staff, rod," is ambiguous. In the Hebrew Bible, this "staff" has two functions: "to ward off threatening enemies, to kill enemies" and "to support one's journey through rough terrain." Both meanings are assumed here (see Nogalski 1993a, 164–65; differently, De Moor 2020, 371). God is asked to support the oppressed and to strike the oppressors.

the flock of your inheritance. Judah qualifies itself with these words. It sees itself as part of God's *naḥlāh,* "inheritance." As each Israelite clan is defined as having inherited a part of the promised land, YHWH inherited Israel and Judah, implying that he has to take care of them.

let it dwell in isolation in a forest. The verb *šākan,* "to dwell," has often been construed as having the connotation here of "living away from where they should have lived," making the clause a negative description of Israel's fate. They are in a way "lost in a forest." The *yod* at the end of *šōknî* is enigmatic. Traditionally, it is construed as a *ḥîreq compaginis,* assuming that the text is poetic (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §8.2e). Others propose to read a plural participle in the construct state *šōknê,* "the inhabitants . . . of the forest" (Mays 1976, 162; Waltke 2007, 440). Syntactically, however, there is too much distance from the *nomen rectum*. Van der Woude (1976, 259–60) offers an ingenious solution by reading *śukkènnû,* "safeguard it," taking the clause as a summons to God to protect his flock. I agree with this interpretation but see no reason to abandon the verb *šākan,* "to dwell." In my view, the form should be construed as an imperative with an ancient spelling. De Moor (2020, 371) asserts the view, without argument, that the words "O, you who dwell alone in a forest" would refer to God.

The noun *yaʿar,* "forest," could refer to a form of shrubland known as *batha* in modern Israel (Van Hecke 2003; Jenson 2008, 186), where cattle could find a meager existence.

in the middle of an orchard. This parallel line underscores the interpretation of the previous clause. The noun *karmèl* is often construed as a toponym (LXX: *karmèlou;* Vulgate: Carmeli; van der Woude 1976, 261; Nogalski 1993a, 38–39, 159–64; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 587; Van Hecke 2003; De Moor 2020, 371–72). The parallelism with *yaʿar,* "forest," however, suggests something agricultural—an orchard or a plantation (see Isa 10:18, 2 Kgs 19:23; Shaw 1993, 195; *DCH* 4:462; Vargon 2009, 599–603).

May they pasture in Bashan and Gilead. The verb form *yirʿû,* "they will pasture," contains an element of wish and hope. The author is looking forward to times when God will let his flock again pasture in "green meadows" (Ps 23). Both Bashan and

Gilead stand metaphorically for the land of milk and honey (De Moor 2020, 372). It is too far-reaching to connect this poetic expression with historical events, for instance, the return of the exiles from the Northern Kingdom to their fields (contra van der Woude 1976, 261–62).

as in ancient days. The past is idealized. The author is longing for the days of Israel's youth when its relations with God were undisturbed (according to some traditions).

7:15. *As in the days of your going out of the land of Egypt*. The memory of the exodus from Egypt functions again as a point of reference for the coming salvation.

I will show him wonders. The substantivized participle *niplā'ôt,* "wonderful things," does not refer to incidents that stand contrary to the laws of nature but qualifies events as astonishing. The noun, connected to the liberation out of Egypt, also occurs at Exod 3:20, 34:10; Josh 3:5; and Ps 107. Elsewhere, the synonym *mōpēt,* "miracle, wonder," is used (for instance, Exod 7:3, 11:9).

The word *'ar'ènnû* is difficult for two reasons. First, if this clause is seen as a continuation of the language of prayer in verse 14, a 1.c.s. verb form is enigmatic. Many scholars therefore propose to read an imperative: **harènnû,* "show us, let us see!" (Wellhausen 1963, 150; Mays 1976, 163; van der Woude 1976, 262; De Moor 2020, 373). With Shaw (2015, 195; followed by Cruz 2016, 212–13; see also Waltke 2007, 442), I construe the MT as phrasing the divine response to the prayer, which is supported by the ancient versions (see also Vargon 2009, 605–6). Second, the ending of the word is sometimes read as a 1.c.p. suffix, "show us" (Allen 1976, 43). This shift presupposes the idea that the word is an imperative, as a translation "I will show us" makes no sense. It should be noted that the 3.m.p. refers to "your people, flock," and not to the feminine (!) enemy.

7:16. *The nations will see and be ashamed*. The unexpected will be seen not only by God's people but also by the *gôyîm,* "the nations." When they witness God's acts in history, shame will come upon them, just as in verse 10 the feminine enemy will be ashamed. They will be confronted with another reality, and a painful feeling of humiliation or distress will alert them to their wrongdoing or foolish behavior (see Stiebert 2002; Lemos 2006).

despite all their strength. In the compound preposition *mikkōl, min* has partitive force (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, §11.2.11). The *gĕbûrāh,* "strength, power," refers to military power but is a religious concept. In the ancient Near Eastern royal ideology, power was seen not as a human attribute but as a divine gift. In the confrontation with Judah, this gift will fail and lead to shame.

They shall hold hand before mouth. The expression *śîm yad 'al-pèh,* "to hold (the) hand before (the) mouth," is a universal human gesture of astonishment and shame (Job 21:5, 29:9, 40:4; Judg 18:19; Prov 30:32; Sir 5:12; the gesture is also present in Hittite and Egyptian texts, Glazov 2002; Korpel and De Moor 2011, 91; De Moor 2020, 374).

their ears will be deafened. Having the ears deafened is a gesture of mourning from shame. A person is made unreachable with respect to all sounds and messages. He or she will be blocked from reality in order to concentrate on personal failures (S. Noll 2019, 117–32).

7:17. *They will lick dust like a serpent*. This expression contains a reference to the garden of Eden story (Gen 3:14). The serpent is cursed for his enticing the human

couple to eat from the forbidden fruit: "on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat" (Gruber 1980, 288–91). The expression *lāḥak ʿāpār,* "to lick the dust," is attested in Isa 49:23 and Ps 72:9. In both texts, this act of foreigners is a sign of humiliation and submission to a future ruler over Israel. As for Mic 7:17, it should be read as a prediction that the former enemy will bow down before Judah. The expression occurs in an Amarna letter in which the inhabitants of Irqata ask for pharaonic help against the Habiru. With the help of Egypt "our enemies will see this and eat dirt (*ti-ka-lu ep-ra*)" (EA 100:34–36; Gruber 1980, 290–91; Barré 1982; Kessler 1999, 307–8).

like reptiles on the earth. The participle of the verb *zāḥal,* "to crawl," occurs only twice in the Hebrew Bible (also at Deut 32:24; see 1QHod 5.27, 1QpMic 12.3). The parallelism with "serpent" in the previous clause suggests a rendering with "reptile" (see already the Vulgate, *reptilia terrae*).

they will come quaking out of their dungeons. The verb *rāgaz,* "to tremble, quake" has in this context the connotation of "to come forth trembling (out of fear)" (see *DCH* 7:409). The noun *misgèrèt,* "stronghold, dungeon," refers to the holes and caverns that reptiles dig to have a secure abode. Metaphorically, the noun stands for those military installations in which the enemy would have felt safe before the wrath of God.

To YHWH, our God, they will come in dread. Andersen and Freedman (2000, 593) argue that the preposition *ʾèl* does not fit the idiom of the verb *pāḥad*, "to be in dread." The expression, however, is attested at Hos 3:5 and Jer 2:19 and denotes the movement of a person while in fear. Hence there is no reason to change *ʾèl* into *ʾēl* and read "El-YHWH, our God." The clause clearly continues to develop the theme of shame and humiliation. The view of van der Woude (1976, 263) that this line is a postexilic gloss is not convincing, since it is based on the unproved assumption that Hos 3:5 is a late insertion.

and they shall fear you. This final clause of the section shifts the direction of speech. YHWH speaks of a change in attitude of the former enemy toward Judah. Eventually, they will reverence the coming shepherd.

Comments

The triangular theme of Micah 7:8–13 is deepened with the prayer to God to send a shepherd who will take care of the transition of God's people to a new era of prosperity. This shepherd has the character of a *Heilszeitherrscher* (ruler over the time of salvation) in days to come (see Höffken 1977; see Notes at Mic 5:1). His deeds will impress the enemy. They will be ashamed and eventually fear him, that is, accept his rule under divine guidance.

The Incomparable God (7:18–20)

7 [18]Who is a god like you
who forgives iniquity,
who passes by the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance;
who does not make firm his anger forever,
because he has a delight in kindness?
[19]He will turn, he will have compassion over us.
He will subdue our iniquities.
You will cast away into the depths of the sea
all their sins.
[20]You will give fidelity to Jacob,
loving-kindness to Abraham
as you swore to our ancestors
in days long ago.

Introduction

Chapters 6–7, and hence the book of Micah in its final form, close with a hymn containing two elements. Verse 18 is a rhetorical question that plays on the name of the prophet. Verses 19–20 depict the impending deeds of liberation by God. The text looks back on the memory of past acts of God that function as an *argumentum ad Deum* (see Sanders 2007). The hope that God will act in a way comparable to the past functions as a motivation for the prayer in 7:14–17. Micah 7:18–20 is clearly an appropriation of the testimonial creed in Exod 34:6–7 to the times of the author (see Brueggemann 1997, 141–42; Jenson 2008, 187–89; Cruz 2016, 223–26; De Moor 2020, 375–79).

Some scholars (e.g., De Moor 2020, 376–77) argue that verses 18c–19a interrupt the stream of thought within the unit. They believe that these verses express a triumphant belief in the grace of God and are written in a different meter. Construing these

lines as a later insertion, however, breaks down the coherence of the unit and undervalues the message of divine support to Judah. In addition, a triumphant tone is absent in these verses.

In my opinion, the unit fits the period just before the reign of King Josiah in view of its hope for redemption. De Moor (2020, 365–71) argues for a slightly later date—the final days of the exile/early period after the return. Jeremias (2007, 222–23) assumes that 7:18–20 are to be construed as the latest redactional addition to Micah. In the Maccabean age, this reference would be a seam through the whole of the Book of the Twelve; a comparable view is proposed by Wöhrle (2008, 335–419; see also Scaiola 2016), who construes 7:18–20 to be part of the final redactional layer of the Book of the Twelve, the *Gnaden Korpus* (grace redaction).

Notes

7:18. *Who is a god like you*. The name of the prophet *mîkāh,* "Micah," is generally seen as a shorter form of *mîkāyāh* or *mîkā'ēl,* "who is like YHWH?" or "who is like god?" (Peacock 2003). The opening of this hymn clearly is a pun on that name. This rhetorical question touches on the theme of divine incomparability. YHWH's incomparability assumes (1) the acceptance of the existence of other deities and (2) a proclamation that these deities are not on a par with the God of Israel (Labuschagne 1966b; Kessler 1999, 309; Banister 2018, 44–46). The incomparability of God is often underscored with deprecating references to the abilities of other gods (see Jer 10; Deutero-Isaiah). Micah 7 takes a different, positive tack by enumerating the virtues of YHWH.

who forgives iniquity. The verb *nāśā',* lit. "to lift," with *'āwōn,* "iniquity," as object refers to the act of pardoning. The expression is part of the traditional testimony of Israel about God (see Exod 34:7, Num 14:18; Brueggemann 1997, 215–18; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 597–98), depicting the way the people felt redeemed by God. The noun *'āwon* refers back to the proclamation of sin in 7:9.

who passes by the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance. The verb *'ābar,* generally, "to pass," can have the meaning "to overlook, to not take into account." The construction with the preposition *'al,* "over," and the noun *pèša',* "transgression," is unique in Mic 7:18 but reflects testimony on divine mercy. The expression *še'ērît naḥlātô,* "the remnant of his inheritance," brings together two ideas on postdisaster Israel that both play a role throughout the book of Micah. The theme of the remnant occurs in Mic 2:12, 4:7, and 5:7, indicating that some, or many, will survive the impending catastrophe. The concept of "inheritance" is mentioned in 2:2, where the inherited plots of land of the impoverished are in danger of being taken away by the rich elite, and in 7:14, where Judah is qualified as God's inheritance.

who does not make firm his anger forever. This testimony on God is a parallel to the idea of God's *'èrèk 'appayîm,* "long suffering," as present in the creed of Exod 34:6.

because he has a delight in kindness. The verb *ḥāpaṣ,* "to desire, have a delight in," indicates a strong affectionate longing and a personal involvement. Just as Israel is summoned to "love loyalty" (Mic 6:8), God is seen as a divine being with a passion for *ḥèsèd,* "kindness, solidarity, loyalty" (Sakenfeld 1985; Clark 1993; De Moor 2020, 376–77).

7:19. *He will turn, he will have compassion over us*. Although there is much to say for the interpretation of the verb form *yāšûb,* "he will turn," as an auxiliary verb

qualifying *yeraḥmēnû* to "he will once more have compassion over us" (Shaw 1993, 195; Andersen and Freedman 2000, 598), I prefer to read it as a nonauxiliary verb. The clause stresses divine changeability. YHWH is not unwavering or immutable (Dorner 1994). As in the twofold changes reflected in Micah 2–5, God here is seen as able to change for the benefit of his people. The concept of divine compassion expresses the affectionate love of God for people in misery throughout the Hebrew Bible. According to the biblical view, the womb is the spot in the human body where the emotions are located. God is moved for his people from the depths of his innermost feelings. With verse 19, the testimony regarding God, expressed by participles in verse 18, is followed by a set of verbs describing God's acts in the near future.

He will subdue our iniquities. At first sight, the expression "to tread on iniquities" seems enigmatic. Some scholars proposed a minor change into **yekabbēś,* "he will wash" (verb *kābas;* Sellin 1922, 303; Rudolph 1975, 129), instead of *yikbōš,* "he will tread." Gordon (1978; adopted by van der Woude 1976, 265; Cathcart 1988, 191; Waltke 2007, 447), however, suggested the existence of an idiomatic expression that has a parallel in a Neo-Babylonian letter: "but if the king my lord does not wish to pardon him for his crimes" (*kabāsu* ša *ḫiṭṭiṭu; ABL* 791, rev. 6–8; the expression already occurs in the Mari letters, ARM 1, 61:8; 10, 53:16). Treading on an iniquity therefore is a form of pardoning (see *CAD* K, 9–10).

You will cast away into the depths of the sea. There is a shift to second-person forms. The proposal of Mays (1976, 166) to change into third-person forms, although smoothing the verse, has no grounding in the ancient versions and overlooks the rhetorical strategy. The general testimony on God moves now into an actual prayer (see also Brueggemann 1997, 141). The verb *šālak,* "to throw away," has the connotation of making the object invisible and out of reach in a way comparable to the scapegoat carrying away the sins of Israel (Andersen and Freedman 2000, 598). The *meṣūlôt yām,* "depths of the sea," are not a topographical place but a mythological one (see Ps 68:23). The sins will be stored away in a remote place of darkness.

all their sins. As in 1:5, the Hebrew noun *ḥaṭṭā't,* "sin," refers to the aspect of "missing one's mark." Phrased differently, the house of Israel did not live up to the social code (Knierim 1967). The expectations set are those of Mic 6:8. The LXX and Vulgate read "our sins," a reading that is corroborated by some medieval Masoretic manuscripts (De Moor 2020, 377–78) but should be seen as an adaptation to make the text smoother.

7:20. *You will give fidelity to Jacob*. The noun *'èmèt* basically means "reliability." The construction with the verb *nātan,* "to give," is in the Hebrew Bible attested only here. A free rendition would be "to act in a reliable way." The distant patriarch Jacob stands in for the people of Israel. The name evokes the stories of divine loyalty.

loving-kindness to Abraham. God will show his *ḥèsèd,* "kindness, solidarity, loyalty," (Sakenfeld 1985; Clark 1993). The distant patriarch Abraham, as in many other prophetic and poetic texts (for instance, Ps 105; Isa 29:22, 41:8), stands for Israel, who without God's intervention would be lost in time and history.

as you swore to our ancestors. Swearing an oath by human beings is a general ancient Near Eastern phenomenon (Conklin 2011). It is a characteristic of YHWH that he can be the subject of swearing an oath and hence oblige himself to the well-being of humans.

in days long ago. Texts like Gen 22:6; Exod 13:11, 32:13; and Deut 28:9 give testimony to this bond between God and people from long ago.

Comments

In this short hymn, the author combines two theological concepts. The idea that YHWH is incomparable is connected with the traditional testimony regarding an active and caring God, as for instance in Exodus 34. The hymn expresses hope. In applying the ancient creed to his own time, the author tries to persuade YHWH to act again on behalf of his suffering people in need. It is hoped that the everlasting solidarity of God will be the source of a new redemptive future (see R. L. Smith 1984, 59; Brueggemann 1997, 141–42; Waltke 2007, 462–66). Even today, this is a consoling message.

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